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Security Council

Fifty-sixth year

Provisional

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Thursday, 15 March 2001, 12.05 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Yel'chenko	(Ukraine)
Members:	Bangladesh	Mr. Ahsan
	China	Mr. Wang Yingfan
	Colombia	Mr. Valdivieso
	France	Mr. Levitte
	Ireland	Mr. Ryan
	Jamaica	Miss Durrant
	Mali	Mr. Issouf Oumar Maiga
	Mauritius	Mr. Latona
	Norway	Mr. Kolby
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Singapore	Ms. Lee
	Tunisia	Mr. Ben Mustapha
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Jeremy Greenstock
	United States of America	Mr. Cunningham

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Letter dated 13 March 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2001/216).

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178.

The meeting was called to order at 12.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Letter dated 13 March 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2001/216)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Algeria, Bahrain, Belgium, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Sudan, Sweden, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Lancry (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; Mr. Baali (Algeria), Mr. Buallay (Bahrain), Mr. Adam (Belgium), Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt), Mr. Al-Douri (Iraq), Mr. Ahmadi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr. Akasaka (Japan), Mr. Al-Hadidi (Jordan), Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait), Mr. Dorda (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia), Mr. Hughes (New Zealand), Mr. Khalid (Pakistan), Mr. Al-Sulaiti (Qatar), Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia), Mr. Kumalo (South Africa), Mr. Erwa (Sudan), Mr. Schori (Sweden), Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic), Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) and Mr. Al-Ashtal (Yemen) took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 15 March 2001 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2001/225, and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council to be held today, Thursday, 15 March 2001, regarding the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the current debate in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 14 March 2001 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which reads as follows:

> "In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I have the honour to request that I be invited to participate in the debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, under rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council."

On previous occasions, the Security Council has extended invitations to representatives of other United Nations bodies in connection with the consideration of matters on its agenda. In accordance with past practice in this matter, I propose that the Council extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in response to the request contained in a letter dated 13 March 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the

United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, document S/2001/216.

I should also like to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2001/209, which contains the text of a letter dated 9 March 2001 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

Members of the Council have received photocopies of a letter date 12 March 2001 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, which will be issued as a document of the Council under the symbol S/2001/227.

The first speaker inscribed on my list is the Permanent Observer of Palestine, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to start by congratulating you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We express our pleasure at seeing you once again at the helm of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine, a very friendly country.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Tunisia and to the Tunisian delegation for the work they carried out last month. They represent a sisterly Arab country, which hosted the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian military cadres for quite some time.

Before I begin reading my official statement to the Council today, perhaps it would be appropriate that I inform the Council of the latest developments in the situation in our occupied territories. Allow me to read out in English this article from Reuters.

(*spoke in English*)

> "At least six Palestinian children were burned when Israeli border police threw a stun grenade into the courtyard of a school in the West Bank city of Hebron on Thursday. Witnesses said some of the children, aged about 10 to 13, screamed as they were carried out of the school into ambulances. At least one child's head was wrapped in a bandage. But doctors described the casualties' burns as moderate to light. The army, which was looking into the report, gave no immediate explanation of the incident."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

I will now go back to my official statement.

The Council is meeting today at the request of Palestine and of the Arab Group. It is the fourth time that the Council has held a public and official meeting to discuss the very dangerous situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, since the visit by Mr. Ariel Sharon, who was elected Prime Minister of Israel, to Al-Haram Al-Sharif last September and the ensuing bloodletting campaign by the Israeli military against the Palestinian people.

During that period, the Security Council adopted resolution 1322 (2000) on 7 October last. The international community and all of us fervently hoped that it would stop Israel, the occupying force, from continuing its campaign against our people and its excessive use of force, that it would restore the situation to what it was before 28 September and that it bring a continuation of the peace process and negotiations between the two parties on the final settlement. Very regrettably, this has not happened.

Israel has escalated its campaign against our people, in complete violation of the provisions of the resolution. In view of this, there was an urgent need for the international community to provide protection to Palestinian civilians who live under Israeli occupation. And the idea crystallized that the United Nations would send an observer force into the territories occupied by Israel since 1967.

The countries of the Non-Aligned Movement in the Council prepared a draft resolution in this context. They used all the ideas put forth by other members to reach acceptable formulas in this respect. They submitted the draft resolution for a vote on 18 December. Regrettably, that draft resolution was not adopted because it could not command the necessary nine votes, in spite of statements by some abstaining members that they had no substantive differences with the draft. This was very a regrettable failure by the Security Council, from our point of view. It may have sent the wrong message to Israel, the occupying force. Since that day, 18 December, the occupation forces have killed more than 80 Palestinian martyrs and have wounded several thousand.

We believe that it would have been possible to save at least some of those people had the Council sent a different message. We say this so that we can make perfectly clear the context in which we are calling on the Council to move in the implementation of its duties under the Charter. Of course, this is in addition to the risks that the current situation in the Palestinian territories might pose for the peace process and for the Middle East as a whole.

During the same period, our Observer Mission sent 30 letters to the President of the Security Council and identical letters to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly, in which we explained developments in the Israeli practices and the Israeli campaign. Our Mission gave several specific examples, as well as the names of Palestinian martyrs, including children under 18 years of age. We sent 30 letters in which we documented everything that was done by Israel. Our file that could be described as the "file of crimes", including measures that represent a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949 and that clearly constitute war crimes in the terms of that Convention.

In these letters we described the Israeli actions under the military bloodletting campaign as follows: deliberate killing, even in circumstances where the safety of the occupation forces were not jeopardized; the wounding of many victims — shooting at the upper limbs and upper parts of the body; the targeting of people by sharpshooters and by other means, using types of ammunition unknown to us; the use of tanks, helicopters and other heavy weapons to shell the Palestinian Authority headquarters and other civilian targets; restrictions on the movement of individuals and goods in Palestinian territory and between the Palestinian territory and the outside world; collective punishment, such as an almost continual curfew on the population of Hebron and the destruction of agriculture, land and other economic installations; and the non-transfer of taxes collected for the Palestinian Authority.

This tragic situation was also described by other international organizations and human rights organizations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, and the committee delegated by the Commission on Human Rights to investigate the situation. In spite of the clarity of this bleak picture, Israel has not stopped making claims of Palestinian violence. The cause of this situation is the Israeli occupation and the measures taken by the occupying forces, which continued even after the start of the peace process, such as the confiscation of territory and the building of settlements. Since 28 September, other measures have included the presence of the Israeli occupation army and the use of its huge military machinery; the presence of the illegal occupiers and settlers and their use of weapons against our people; the deliberate destruction of the Palestinian economy; and the transforming of the lives of the Palestinian people into a veritable hell.

Of course, there is a complete popular Palestinian rejection of all of this. Here we have to say that in the face of all these Israeli policies and measures, some limited elements have accepted the use of reciprocal violence. However, this cannot at all change the clear and definitive nature of the situation.

Let us take another look at the numbers: the huge number of Palestinian casualties and the limited Israeli casualties, for which we also express our regret. But the difference is huge and beyond comparison. In addition, there is no Israeli civilian presence within the occupied Palestinian territory; there are the members of the occupation army and settlers who reside there illegally, in violation of international law. The question here is how can any party, at least in view of these facts, talk about Palestinian violence, except those who believe that the Israeli human casualties are different qualitatively from the Palestinian human casualties? But this would represent such a racist situation that we would not even be able to begin to deal with it.

Why does Israel, the occupation force, do all of this? We are not really sure, after all this time and all this suffering. Perhaps the Israeli army or some of its elements are completely out of control — some refer in particular to the Chief of Staff, Mr. Mofaz, as one example of this. Perhaps the Israeli political leadership would like to break Palestinian political will and impose certain solutions on the Palestinian side. Perhaps it is even worse — perhaps the political leadership has concluded that it could not implement the agreements undertaken in the peace process, including the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). It may wish to exit the peace process and to throw the blame on the Palestinian side. Perhaps it is a combination of all these factors.

The important thing here, regardless of reasons and motives, is that we stop this tragedy as soon as possible. In this respect, we must refer to the responsibility of the international community, particularly that of the Security Council. Stopping the serious and dangerous deterioration is the necessary prelude to restoring the situation to the way it was before 28 September, saving the peace process and resuming the negotiations between the two sides.

This brings me to the situation of the peace process, both before and after the installation of the new Israeli cabinet. The Israeli party claims that the previous Government made unprecedented concessions, which the Palestinian side rejected. This tells only half the story and in a very evasive and deceptive way paints a different picture. The previous Israeli Government may have adopted positions that were unprecedented by any adopted by earlier Israeli Governments, but that is not the question. The question is the Israeli positions of the past, particularly if they were unreasonable and contrary to international law and legitimacy. The standard that should be used is consonance with the peace process, which includes implementation of Security Council 242 (1967) and the principle of land for peace. That is the yardstick.

Here, I say very clearly that the previous Government did not adopt positions consonant with the peace process or with the implementation of agreements, although these positions were progressive relative to those of previous Governments. That is what prevented us from reaching an agreement at the Camp David summit.

Let me say here that the Palestinian side has accepted, with some reservations, the principles that were later declared by former United States President Clinton. This indicates our commitment to the bases of the peace process and that we are ready to negotiate on the basis of those principles. In the wake of the summit, the two parties achieved reasonable progress in the Taba talks. It would have been possible to achieve further progress had it not been for the known and constant of Mr. Barak up to the very last moment.

As for the current Israeli Government, its positions completely contradict the bases of the peace process and the agreements concluded between the two parties. This Government, through the head of its cabinet in particular, claims that it cannot negotiate while the violence continues, as if the Palestinian side were responsible for the occupation and the practices of the Israeli army, the settlers and the campaign against our people. It acts as if we can isolate the situation on the ground from the political situation and the future of an entire people.

The Israeli Government also refuses to negotiate from the point that was reached by the two sides in Taba. In other words, it would want to take us back a very long way. Much more serious than that, however — and here we are talking about the essence of that Government's position — is its reluctance to negotiate a final settlement in favour of new interim arrangements and solutions. This clearly indicates its desire to dissociate itself from the implementation of resolution 242 (1967). It would like to impose an eternal interim stage on the Palestinian people following the five interim years and their extension. This, of course, destroys the basis of the peace process and the agreements concluded between the two sides.

Yesterday, Mr. Shimon Peres, the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, met here with the Security Council. That was good. Mr. Peres is a veteran politician known to be reasonably moderate. The problem is that he represents a Government that does not reflect that reasonable moderation. The question is whether Mr. Peres and his colleagues can influence the policies of that Government or whether the Government will use them as a cover for its extremist policies. So far, the omens are bad. Mr. Peres laid out the position of Mr. Sharon as we already know it with respect to the current situation, his refusal to accept a United Nations observer mission and even the future of the peace process, not to mention the other news and indications to be inferred from the escalating measures adopted by the Government in imposing a suffocating blockade against the Palestinian people.

These positions impose clear responsibilities on the international community, in particular the two sponsors of the peace process and, specifically, the United States, which was a party to the current agreements.

We all bear the responsibility to maintain and support the peace process by preserving its agreed bases and by insisting on a commitment to concluded agreements. On our part, we reaffirm our commitment to all of this, to our strategic choice of peace and to our readiness immediately to resume negotiations on a final settlement.

We call on the Israeli side immediately to halt the bloody military campaign against our people and to resume negotiations on a final settlement, taking into account the progress made to date in the negotiations. We call on the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to take the necessary steps to help the two sides to surmount the current situation, to put an end to the current tragedy and to restore control as a prelude to the resuscitation of the peace process, as I have mentioned before, through practical measures, including the establishment of an observer force.

We dearly hope that the Security Council will play that role this time and will contribute to improving the situation so as to achieve lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East as a whole.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Israel, on whom I now call.

Mr. Lancry (Israel): Mr. President, at the outset, I wish to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council, and I wish you much success in this capacity. I wish also to thank your predecessor, the Ambassador of Tunisia, for his most able leadership.

Yesterday, the Council heard a statement by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, Mr. Shimon Peres. I believe that Minister Peres clearly described the position of the Israeli Government on all issues pertaining to the situation in the Middle East and specifically to the deliberations at hand, those regarding an international presence in the territories. I wish to thank the members of the Council for yesterday's constructive dialogue and for their obvious concern for peace and security for all the peoples of the region.

Mr. Peres articulated a vision of cooperation and coexistence between Israel and the Palestinians, one in which economic cooperation has transcended territorial conflict and facilitated its resolution. He spoke of the primary importance that the new Israeli Government attaches to the pursuit of peace. Indeed, he observed that the current crisis in the peace process is not exclusively territorial, but emotional as well. Though I do not wish to be redundant, I do wish to add my voice to Mr. Peres' voice in cautioning the Council, at this extremely sensitive time, when tensions and emotions are running high, not to add a new, complicating factor to an already difficult situation.

At this point, I should like to recall a statement made by that late, great statesman, French President François Mitterrand, commenting, in a context that was not totally similar, on the need to enhance international intervention during the Bosnian conflict. He said, "Let us not add war to war".

Today's meeting comes as no surprise to us. The recent actions of the Palestinians, including pronouncements in the media and documents circulated by the Permanent Observer of Palestine — my colleague, Ambassador Nasser Al-Kidwa — have made no secret of the fact that the Palestinians wish to see the Security Council intervene in this matter. This initiative was prepared weeks ago and has been undertaken without even giving the new Israeli Government a chance to reassess the situation.

Thus, we believe that the initiative under discussion today is part of a larger strategy. The Palestinians often speak — as my dear colleague, Ambassador Al-Kidwa, just did — of their strategic choice for peace. This, we believe, is a genuine Palestinian aspiration. Where we part ways, however, is in how we seek to achieve such a peace. Do we wish to make peace through dialogue and negotiation, or through violence and terror?

A prominent European statesman put it this way: one cannot search for peace with a pen in one hand and a bomb in the other. Now the Palestinians want a pen in one hand, a bomb in the other, and an international shield in between.

The Palestinian intifada, as it has existed for nearly six months now, is incompatible with international protection. Not once, in a confrontation that is almost half a year old, has Chairman Arafat, as the leader of the Palestinians, called for an end to the violence. Are the Palestinians, by asking for an international protection force, now implying a renunciation of violence?

The situation as it exists in the Palestinian territories today is not one of a threatened people who are in dire need of protection. Indeed, the only thing the Palestinians need protection from is the consequences of their own actions.

Since the last time the Council met to discuss this issue, it has become widely acknowledged that the responsibility for the violence lies with the Palestinians. This has been Israel's contention all along, but developments in recent months have made this truth incontrovertible. I should like to mention just a few brief points that serve to illustrate this assertion.

First, it is important to ask, as did Cicero in ancient Rome, "*Qui bono*?" Who is benefiting? Without question, the Palestinians have benefited tremendously from the international attention that they have attracted. Since September, the international media have trained their lenses squarely on the Palestinians, and the Palestinians themselves have been enormously successful at manipulating that attention to their maximum advantage. Yesterday, Minister Peres described an intercepted message in which Palestinians were instructed not to begin throwing stones until CNN reporters, who were caught in traffic, could arrive on the scene.

Secondly, despite Chairman Arafat's commitments to control terror and violence, as enshrined in his letter to Prime Minister Rabin of 9 September 1993, and despite the understanding reached at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit in October, Chairman Arafat has still not called upon his people to stop the intifada. Just this week, Chairman Arafat had such an opportunity when he spoke to the Palestinian Legislative Council in Gaza City, an address that was carried on Palestinian radio. Had Chairman Arafat issued such a call — as he had previously agreed — it would have been an important first step towards the immediate relief of the suffering of the Palestinian people and would have made today's meeting completely unnecessary. His failure to issue such a call is a strong indication that the Chairman does not really wish to see the violence brought to a close.

Thirdly, the Palestinian leadership has, over the course of the past few months, consistently acted to encourage rather than to quell the confrontations. In this regard, I must recall the continuing incitement to violence on television, on the radio, in newspapers and in the mosques, as well as the release of convicted terrorist prisoners from Palestinian Authority prisons — an action that directly contributed to the recent rise in terrorist attacks inside Israel. Besides being a blatant violation of signed agreements with Israel, these actions clearly demonstrate the central role of the Palestinian leadership in perpetuating the conflict, and they make it impossible to pursue a dialogue with our Palestinian partners under the current conditions.

Fourthly, there are the statements of Palestinian officials themselves, who have admitted to the fact that the Palestinian leadership made active preparations for the outbreak of the hostilities as early as last July. The Palestinian daily newspaper *Al-Ayyam*, on 6 December 2000, quoted Imad Al-Falouji, the Palestinian Minister of Communications, as saying that the Palestinian Authority had begun preparations for the outbreak of the current intifada from the moment the Camp David talks concluded, in accordance with instructions given by Chairman Arafat himself. Mr. Al-Falouji went on to state that Mr. Arafat launched this intifada as the culminating stage of "Palestinian steadfastness" in the negotiations, according to *Al-Ayyam*, 6 December 2000. More recently, Mr. Falouji reiterated the involvement of the Palestinian leadership in orchestrating the violence in a statement quoted by Reuters on 4 March 2001.

The Oslo peace process was based on the fundamental commitment of the Palestinian leadership to renounce the use of violence and terrorism and to settle all outstanding claims through peaceful bilateral negotiations. This commitment was expressly stated in the letter of Chairman Arafat to the late Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, on 9 September 1993. In the letter Mr. Arafat stated,

> "The PLO recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security ... The PLO commits itself to the Middle East peace process and to a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two sides and declares that all outstanding issues relating to permanent status will be resolved through negotiations. The PLO renounces the use of terrorism and other acts of violence and will assume responsibility over all PLO elements and personnel in order to assure their compliance, prevent violations and discipline violators."

It was only in response to these cardinal undertakings that the Government of Israel recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and agreed to formally negotiate with it in the context of the Middle East peace process.

These letters of mutual recognition, to which we have so often referred in past statements before the Council, and which were exchanged just prior to the signing of the Declaration of Principles in September 1993, constitute the underlying basis of the Israeli-

Palestinian peace process and of all subsequent agreements concluded between the parties. As such, any violation of the commitments contained in these letters undermines the very foundation of the peace process and imperils the achievement of its noble objectives.

The new Israeli Government, under the leadership of Ariel Sharon, wants nothing more than to achieve a just and lasting peace settlement with the Palestinians. The Government has frozen settlement construction and has decided against any acts of collective punishment, not because it was forced to do so, but out of a real and genuine desire for peace. As Minister Peres said yesterday, peace is the chief objective of the present Government. To that end, we must quickly resume negotiations, though in an atmosphere of calm and tranquillity, not through a vicious cycle of violence.

The current Palestinian initiative requests that the Council send a mission of international observers to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This is an initiative that is completely unnecessary.

Chairman Arafat has the ability to protect the lives of his people himself. All he needs to do, and indeed all we are asking of him, is to publicly call upon his people to stop the confrontation. Though he has promised us repeatedly that he would take such a step, he has ignored his many opportunities to do so.

Moreover, the current Palestinian initiative represents a blatant attempt to obscure their strategic choice, and as such, the Security Council must not be a party to it. The United Nations cannot be called upon to put out fires on behalf of the same party that has kindled the flames. Such a precedent would be disastrous since it would effectively send a message to the Palestinians — not to mention every other aggrieved people of the world — that violence and aggression will lead to sympathy and international protection.

The Council must also recognize that sending United Nations personnel to the territories while the intifada continues has the potential to actually escalate the violence and further destabilize the region. The Palestinians have, at least for the time being, elected to pursue the path of confrontation as a means to achieve their political goals. An international presence would be interpreted as sanctioning this strategy, and would therefore solidify the Palestinians' refusal to put down their weapons, negotiate with Israel and reach a compromise agreement. And, as I have already mentioned, the mere presence of international observers would, as has occurred in the past with regard to the international media, lead the Palestinians to provoke further confrontations. Indeed, the presence of United Nations personnel would create a significant incentive for the Palestinians to continue the violent struggle. More significantly, it would not succeed in ending the violence, since observers are unable to stop terrorism.

Thus, peace and security would not be enhanced by an international force. A peace agreement would not be brought closer; it would be moved farther away. The Security Council, as the body charged with maintaining international peace and security, would be highly inspired if it would refrain from any action that would undermine this objective. If the international community wishes to see a return to dialogue and negotiation and the ultimate realization of the legitimate aspirations and needs of both parties through a peaceful process, it must insist that the Palestinians stop the violence, which they have initiated, and refrain from actions that may be construed as endorsing violence. Palestinians and Israelis working together: this is the only way to end the spiral of violence and move towards a more peaceful future.

It is also worth reminding the Council that there is already an international delegation that will be arriving in the region next week. The Mitchell commission, with which the Government of Israel has expressed its willingness to cooperate fully, will report to the President of the United States and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the nature and causes of the current violence.

Contrary to allegations and gross mistranslations and misrepresentations of Israel's policies in the face of continuous terrorist threats, our armed forces are not seeking to suffocate the Palestinian people. As Minister Peres said, we seek the advancement and prosperity of the Palestinian people and are willing to work harder towards that goal together with other nations of the world. The present security situation in Israel, however, is real and dangerous. Just this week, police sappers thwarted a car-bomb attack outside the town of Beit Shemesh. In recent weeks we have seen terrorist bombings in Netanya, Jerusalem and the Mei-Ami junction. As far as I understand, at least Netanya and the Mei-Ami junction are not places where illegal settlements are located in Israel. I say this because there has been an attempt by my Palestinian colleague to plant some confusion about the terrorist activities that occur in Israel itself, not in the territories.

We have experienced abductions and murders. Our citizens are being shot and killed as they drive to and from their homes, including inside of Israel, not only in the territories. This has become a daily aspect of life in Israel that cannot be tolerated by any Israeli Government. It is completely wrong and irresponsible to portray Israel's response to this constantly looming threat as a punitive action taken against the Palestinian people.

Israel has never, and will never, initiate conflict with the Palestinians. They are our neighbours and our partners in peace. A concerted effort on the part of the Palestinian leadership to control violence and terror would enable Israel to ease restrictions in the territories and work again, as we have in the past, to improve the quality of our coexistence. It is the encouragement of confrontation, and the lack of will to bring it to an end, that have brought needless hardships to the civilian population.

It cannot be emphasized enough: peace and violence are mutually exclusive; you must abandon one in order to get the other. What is needed from the Security Council is not intervention, but support for the parties and their bilateral efforts to achieve peace. The Security Council must encourage all relevant parties to be careful with their words, to refrain from language that will incite.

I would urge Council members to consider, above all else, whether an international presence will truly advance our common goal of peace and reconciliation. I believe that the deployment of such a force — and I stress this — while the intifada is still being employed as a strategic tool for political gain would, rather than bringing calm and quiet, be a recipe for long-term instability in the region.

I wish to conclude by calling out in peace to the Palestinian people on behalf of the Government and people of Israel. Let us strive to rejuvenate the spirit embodied in the letters of mutual recognition, broaden the channels of communication and enhance the sense of goodwill and brotherhood between our two peoples. Let us join together in creating an environment of peace and coexistence that will serve as a model for the entire region. Our hand is extended, our leadership is willing and our people are eager.

The President: I thank the representative of Israel for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of the United Arab Emirates, whom I invite to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, allow me first, on behalf of the Arab Group, over which I have the honour to preside, to extend to you our congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We are confident that your expertise and thorough knowledge of international relations will greatly contribute to the Council's role in maintaining international peace and security. On this occasion, I would not fail to extend our appreciation to His Excellency the Permanent Representative of brotherly Tunisia for his successful presidency of the Council last month and for the positive results that have been achieved.

The Security Council is meeting today to discuss the situation and serious developments on the Palestinian scene, particularly in light of the new Israeli Government's continuation of its policies of systematic economic siege, the destruction of human, social and economic infrastructure and its practices of terrorism and ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people, in addition to its rejection of cooperation with the Mitchell fact-finding mission on aggression against the Palestinian people, one of the most horrendous acts of aggression in the history of humankind, particularly with regard to human rights.

Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) and the resolutions of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, as well as resolutions adopted by human rights and other related bodies, have all requested the Israeli Government as the occupying power to cease immediately all practices of deliberate killing, in particular of women and children, and to cease its bombardment of and aggression against unarmed Palestinian people and the strict closure of Palestinian cities and villages. However, since Sharon's assumption of the present Government, he has exposed his real intentions and designs, which are more aggressive towards the Palestinians and Arabs and which could be considered an extension of his historic criminal policies. One example of this was the massacre at Sabra and Chatila in 1982, when hundreds of unarmed women and children fell victim.

Mr. Sharon's Deputy and Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, committed a similar criminal act, witnessed by the entire world, against the inhabitants of Qana in southern Lebanon. Even United Nations forces in Lebanon were not spared by that act of aggression.

Today the Palestinian people face the same systematic pattern of terror and aggression. Since December, Israeli military forces have been implementing a serious design of deliberate killing, siege and closure of Palestinian villages and cities. They are preventing access to food supplies and medicines, in addition to other necessary humanitarian needs, and are severing communications with all Palestinian areas by establishing checkpoints, military and otherwise, around Palestinian villages and cities in order to partition the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and to transform them into 60 cantons very similar to collective detention centres. This is a most horrendous act and a violation of human rights. Furthermore, they continue to implement unprecedented policies aimed at destroying the human, social and economic infrastructures of the Palestinian people, coupled with the withholding of financial entitlements to the Palestinian Authority that are measured in millions of dollars.

The United Arab Emirates, on behalf of the Arab Group, expresses its strong condemnation and grave concern regarding this serious military escalation by Israel — aggression that has resulted in the death of 400 innocent Palestinians, particularly women and children, in addition to the injury and crippling of thousands of other innocent Palestinian inhabitants — and considers the Al-Aksa intifada a reflection of Palestinian desperation and frustration and one of the simplest means of self-defence against the Israeli war machine and the heavily armed settlers who possess internationally prohibited weapons that they use against the Palestinian people, who can only defend themselves, their sons and their rights, by throwing stones at their killers in the Israeli army.

We are confident and fully convinced that the situation would not have deteriorated to such a serious stage had the Security Council responded by adopting the draft resolution submitted by the Non-Aligned caucus last December calling for the formation of an international observer force to protect the Palestinian people from all these violations and crimes committed by Israel against it.

The Arab Group hopes that today's Council meeting will result in the adoption of immediate and urgent measures that would reflect the Council's responsibility in the maintenance of international peace and security. Such measures should include, first, bringing the highest degree of pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to force it to immediately cease its wanton aggression against the Palestinian people and to lift its siege of their cities and villages and to allow access to humanitarian assistance — financial, relief, and otherwise — without any further delay; secondly, securing the adoption by the Security Council of the draft resolution that was submitted to it last December calling for the formation of an international observer force to provide protection to the Palestinian people; and thirdly, proceeding to provide urgent financial, economic and humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, the Arab Group would like once again to reiterate its full support of and solidarity with the Palestinian people and its National Authority in their continued search to realize their legitimate rights to establish their own independent State, with Al-Quds as its capital. The Arab Group would also like to reaffirm its determination to continue the march towards a just and comprehensive peace based on resolutions of the international legitimacy, particularly resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace, as well as towards the implementation of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) on the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland, Palestine.

The Arab Group would also like to request the Israeli side to strictly adhere to its commitments as well as to political and legal undertakings stipulated in the agreements it has concluded with the Palestinian side, in particular those related to the removal of settlements and to putting an end to the occupation of all Arab and Palestinian territories that have been occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds al-Sharif and the Syrian Golan, and to complete its withdrawal from the occupied Lebanese territories, and to remove all weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, in order to promote confidence-building measures leading to the realization of peace, stability and security in the region.

The President: I thank the representative of the United Arab Emirates for the kind words he addressed to me.

Mr. Ben Mustafa (Tunisia) *(spoke in Arabic):* May I first of all thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this urgent meeting of the Council in an immediate response to the request made by the Palestinian side, supported by the Arab Group and the Non-Aligned Movement, to consider the dangerous situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Today, it is clear that the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has been one of unprecedented seriousness for years. As is well known, the situation in the field, in terms of its negative characteristics of violence — Israeli violence — which has been ongoing since last fall and is stifling the Palestinian people and targeting it in all its sectors. This violence manifests itself in many forms and in many ways.

First, it is military violence. Israel is making use of the most powerful, modern, lethal and destructive weapons. The Israeli forces, of course, are making use of such weapons in a framework of an imbalance of forces compared to the Palestinians, who limit themselves to stones. Would it suffice to say that the force exerted by Israel against the Palestinians is excessive and disproportionate? The least that could be said is that this Israeli violence has up till now led to hundreds of Palestinian casualties — dead and wounded.

The second manifestation of Israeli violence against the Palestinian people is the economic blockade consisting of besieging Palestinian villages and cities by digging trenches around them, surrounding them with military forces and tanks in order to isolate them and restrict the movement of their inhabitants, and finally, starving the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian population.

While the world was waiting to hear something new from the present Israeli Coalition Government that would provide us with some hope regarding positive new developments, this new Government has begun a policy of escalation and major intensification. It is implementing a military plan designed to dismember and fragment Gaza and the West Bank into several cantons thus facilitating the isolation of cities and villages and ultimately blockading them. This policy aims at tightening the economic vice against the Palestinian people and making its destitution even worse by undermining its economic and social infrastructure, which is already all too fragile.

This is a deliberate, orchestrated, calculated policy. Each of these elements shows that there is an objective behind each of them, an objective aimed at bringing the Palestinian people to its knees, at subjecting it and forcing it to make concessions that were not mentioned during the negotiations over the last years.

We read and hear all the pretexts put forward by Israel to justify this dual repression of extraordinary brutality against the Palestinian people. Yesterday, we heard the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel justify that policy for Israeli security considerations. He told us that this was aimed at coping with extremism and terrorism. This is an attempt obviously designed to pass off Israel as the victim and to place it on the defensive.

Here, I would like to say two basic things regarding the situation. First, with regard to the imbalance of power in Israel's favour, there is absolutely no link between the military brutality and the economic problems that Israel is causing for Palestinians, on the one hand, and Israeli security on the other. As we said yesterday, the tight siege of Palestinian cities and towns, a form of collective punishment against the Palestinian people, cannot, in fact, deter anyone who wants to set off a bomb. Those measures are totally unacceptable in today's world.

Secondly, with regard to this open debate on the serious situation in the occupied territories, there is a need to put things in their proper context. What is the problem? The problem is essentially one of the decades-long Israeli colonization of the Palestinian territories. That colonization and occupation is accompanied by a usurpation of the national rights of the Palestinian people, to their land and property, to a decent life of dignity and self-determination; in addition, this is accompanied by ongoing brutality and repression. This is the basic problem: the Israeli occupation is the underlying cause of the existing imbalance and of all the acts of violence and bloody confrontation that we are seeing in the occupied territories.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, when colonization has disappeared in an era of freedom and human rights, the Palestinian people continue to suffer under Israeli occupation and to have their rights trampled. Israel has for decades flouted all the resolutions of the international community, including resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which reaffirm that occupied Palestinian territories should be restored to Palestinians. The same holds true for the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and other agreements, signed between the two parties. This is the fundamental issue. When this problem disappears, then violence and conflict will disappear from the occupied territories. This is a situation that must be changed radically if we are finally to create peace and launch the energetic actions required to implement a future for the peoples of the region.

The Palestinian side has fulfilled all the obligations and commitments it undertook since the beginning of the peace process in Madrid and Oslo. The Palestinian side has cooperated politically and security-wise with the Israeli side in an unprecedented manner. It should not be forgotten that the Palestinians have made preliminary concessions and have agreed to accept only 22 per cent of the area of Palestine at the time of the Mandate. This is important. What does Israel expect? Does Israel expect even less land to be given? The peace process that began in Madrid — a process that my country has supported and in which it has participated — remains the fundamental and ideal framework to advance the peace process in the Middle East, above all between Palestine and Israel.

The Palestinian side, as well as the Arab countries, have always been committed to peace as a strategic option. We are making every effort to achieve that peace. We are demonstrating good intentions and all the necessary political will. But, like all peoples of the world, the Palestinian side cannot accept the renunciation of its fundamental and legitimate rights. Those inalienable national rights include, above all, the right of Palestinians to self-determination and to establish their own independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. In addition, they include the rights of Palestinians reaffirmed by international resolutions, in addition to the principle of land for peace. Those resolutions represent the legal and moral authority for any just, lasting and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.

I must therefore say in all sincerity — and here I turn to the Israelis — that systematically procrastinating and side-stepping all the resolutions, understandings and agreements as a matter of policy will not achieve peace or serve the cause of peace; nor will it help us to make progress. Genuine and lasting peace cannot be made by one party alone. Consensus is therefore necessary. Israel is called upon today to demonstrate its determination by agreeing on peace with the Palestinian side and by demonstrating the necessary political will to achieve that peace. This requires the return of the two parties to the negotiating table. The Palestinian party wants to see a return to the negotiating table from the point where the negotiations stopped with the former Israeli Government. International custom requires that States remain bound by agreements concluded by previous Governments. Any kind of peace between Israel and Palestine must be a continuous one; otherwise there will be an indefinite continuation of pointless and senseless action in a vacuum.

Yesterday we heard the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel reject the idea of international protection for the Palestinian people. He disputed the legitimacy of sending an international observer mission to the field. He even refused to have those observers armed or even equipped with cameras. Such a mission, in his view, could pose a threat to civilians or risk an escalation of the situation. In all sincerity, we do not understand that logic. We do not understand how a camera could be more of an incitement to violence than a gun. This is what we do not understand.

We do feel that yesterday's meetings with the Israeli Minister for Foreign Affairs and with the Permanent Observer of Palestine clearly showed us that the idea of sending international observers will receive general support. I think that it is time for the Council, within the framework of its role in following the situation in the region — an integral part of its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security — to tackle the issue seriously and to study all ways and means to respond to the call for observers.

I think that it is false to say that such a mission would internationalize the situation. In fact, the situation has naturally been an international one since the Organization was established. It is international resolutions — whether resolution 242 (1967), 338 (1973) or any other — that represent the legal and moral authority in the occupied territories. The situation there is so unbalanced that it could threaten international peace and security. A bilateral process can be continued only if it is part of a multilateral process that can provide full backing for the peace process. Anything less will face us with disastrous consequences in the region and in the world as a whole.

Finally, I wish to say that Tunisia vigorously supports the request made here in the Council by Chairman Arafat some time ago to re-establish the confidence that is indispensable for a continuation of the peace process from the point where it stopped. That request is reasonable, has the backing of the Arab Group and meets the demands of all parties, including Israel.

The President: There are a number of speakers remaining on my list. In view of the lateness of the hour, and with the concurrence of the members of the Council, I intend to suspend the meeting now.

The meeting was suspended at 1.20 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.4295 (Resumption 1)

Security Council

Fifty-sixth year

Provisional

4295th meeting

Thursday, 15 March 2001, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Yel'chenko	(Ukraine)
Members:	Bangladesh	Mr. Ahsan
	China	Mr. Wang Yingfan
	Colombia	Mr. Valdivieso
	France	Mr. Levitte
	Ireland	Mr. Ryan
	Jamaica	Miss Durrant
	Mali	Mr. Issouf Oumar Maiga
	Mauritius	Mr. Neewoor
	Norway	Mr. Kolby
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Singapore	Mr. Mahbubani
	Tunisia	Mr. Ben Mustapha
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Jeremy Greenstock
	United States of America	Mr. Cunningham

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Letter dated 13 March 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2001/216).

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178.

01-28810 (E)

The meeting was resumed at 3.15 p.m.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Cuba, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the discussion without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Dausá Céspedes (Cuba) took a seat at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: Members of the Council have received photocopies of a letter dated 14 March 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2001/231.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation attaches great importance to continued discussion in the Security Council of the question of the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The statements made on 14 March at the meetings of the Security Council by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, Mr. Shimon Peres, and by the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, Ambassador Al-Kidwa, provided an opportunity for the members of the Security Council to hear about the approaches of the Israelis and of the Palestinians to ways of overcoming violence on the West Bank and in Gaza and to the search for a way out of the deadlock in the peace dialogue.

The Russian Federation has been following with great concern the situation of tension that has prevailed for more than half a year now in the Palestinian territories, as well as the continued acts of violence that have led to the deaths of several hundred people, mostly Palestinians. Since the very beginning of the crisis, the leadership of Russia has been undertaking maximum efforts towards a settlement of the situation and a resumption of the peaceful dialogue between the parties. To this end, the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Igor Ivanov, have remained in constant contact with the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships and with the leaders of other interested States, as well as the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Unfortunately, the tensions are not easing. The situation is being exacerbated by the actions of the Israeli side, aimed at the isolation of the West Bank and Gaza, with the use of heavy military equipment. There is a virtual economic blockade of the territory of the Palestinian National Authority. We take note of the clarifications that were made in the statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, Shimon Peres, at yesterday's Security Council meeting, and which were also reiterated today by the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations. We are convinced, however, that the economic blockade must be immediately lifted.

It should be clear also that no terrorist acts — and Russia condemns all such acts — can serve as a justification for such harsh measures as those that are now being taken against the Palestinians. On the contrary, we are convinced that such steps can only play into the hands of those who want the violence to continue and who are against a resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating process.

We believe that at this stage, a priority task must be the speedy overcoming of violence in the West Bank and in Gaza. On that basis, we call upon the Palestinians and the Israelis to demonstrate maximum restraint and prudence in order to avoid any further escalation of the conflict.

We are convinced that, now as never before, compromise is important, and that both sides must meet each other halfway, demonstrate flexibility and realism and ensure the continuity of the peace process, on the basis, first and foremost, of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and of the Madrid principles. To this end, there must be a speedy establishment of direct Palestinian-Israeli contacts, inter alia, at a high level. Only in that way will it be possible to eliminate the obstacles to a normalization of the situation and to the resumption of the peaceful negotiations.

In that context, we note the exchange of messages that took place between the leader of the Palestinian National Authority, Yasser Arafat, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon. We note also that that exchange was carried out in a rather constructive spirit. The most important thing is that both leaders have reaffirmed their aspiration to achieve peace. In

Moscow, hope is being expressed that these positive signals will be further developed in the very near future.

For its part, the Russian Federation is continuing to make every effort to promote the elaboration of a strategy to resolve the current crisis that would be acceptable to the parties directly involved in the conflict and that would promote a speedy settlement of the situation in the region. It is precisely those approaches that will be guiding us in the Security Council in the consideration of the question of a possible international presence in the occupied Palestinian territories. We are counting on the fact that the Security Council will be able to achieve consensus on this question.

Mr. Levitte (France) (*spoke in French*): The Ambassador of Sweden will express the position of all of the countries of the European Union in his statement, which France wholeheartedly supports. However, France would like to stress several points.

France wishes first of all to express its very deep consternation at the tragedy that has been unfolding over the past six months in the Palestinian territories and in Israel. More than 400 people have died, most of them Palestinians, including dozens of children. Here we would like to express our deepest regrets and extend our condolences to the families of all the victims.

The situation is serious. The parties appear to have less and less control over the events. There is continuing insecurity in the Palestinian territories and in Israel, despair on the part of a people with no prospects, and a disastrous economic situation. Negotiations between the parties have been broken off since the Tabah meeting, and a climate of deep-seated suspicion and even hatred prevails. The gains of the Oslo process are in jeopardy.

It is crucial that calm be restored. France and the European Union have on several occasions condemned violence in all its forms: the use of excessive force by the Israeli army against Palestinian civilians and the unacceptable summary executions, but also the acts of terrorism that have caused grief among the Israeli people.

France and the European Union have also registered their deep concern at the measures taken by Israeli Government, including the blockading of territories and the refusal to hand over to the Palestinian Authority the taxes that have been assessed on its behalf — these are among the many collective reprisals that can only exacerbate tensions and the resentment of an entire people. Generally speaking, Israel must respect human rights and international humanitarian law, namely the Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies to all of the occupied Palestinian territories.

The easing of travel restrictions imposed by the Israeli Government, if indeed it takes place, is a move in the right direction. The strategy followed in recent weeks could only fuel frustrations and worsen the already catastrophic economic situation. The European Union and its members — the largest provider of assistance to the Palestinian people — have taken special measures to assist the population and the Palestinian Authority. The entire international community must take part in this spirit of solidarity.

These violent confrontations are all the more troublesome considering that the two parties had never been so close to peace, both at Camp David and at Tabah. Openness on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides had made it possible to obtain, for the very first time, a glimpse of an agreement, even on the most sensitive aspects — Jerusalem, refugees and the territories.

Hopes for peace and for harmonious coexistence, focused on cooperation and the future, must live on. We continue to believe that the negotiations of the last few months have paved the way for us to follow. The solutions that have been explored will one day form the basis of the long-awaited final settlement. Such a settlement must be based on Israel's right to live in peace within recognized borders and on the right of the Palestinian people to have a state, a territory and a capital. It is based on resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), on the principle of land for peace, and on the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference.

Weapons must be silenced, and dialogue must resume. We solemnly call upon the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to do all within their power to halt the spiral of violence. The current situation, in which each is waiting for the other to make the first move, can only lead to an impasse. Firm acts are necessary to restore real trust. Respect for the agreements signed since Oslo and a real freeze on settlements will greatly contribute to this.

The Palestinian issue cannot be separated from a just and comprehensive settlement of the conflict between Israel and the Arab countries. We call for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon on the basis of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

How can we help negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority? We have to think about how to restore a minimum of trust between the parties. The impetus provided by the United States remains essential. The European Union, Russia, Egypt, Jordan and the United Nations can also contribute to this, as they showed at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit. In particular the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who has close contacts with all the parties involved in the Middle East crisis, can play a useful role. We fully support his action.

However, the Security Council also has a part to play. The current situation is a threat to peace in the region and therefore comes under its jurisdiction. It has already addressed the historical background and the origins of the crisis by adopting resolution 1322 (2000). It is now up to the Security Council, with Israel and the Palestinian Authority, to think about proposals that would facilitate contacts between the parties and would guarantee the desired results.

Sending observers to the field could be a useful mechanism in this regard, to ease tensions and to monitor compliance with commitments undertaken by the parties. That is why France, along with other countries, particularly the United Kingdom, initiated this idea last November. This mechanism will be helpful if it is accepted and agreed upon by the parties, and if it enjoys their full cooperation. The work of the observers would be an extension of the work begun by the Mitchell commission. The mechanism will be useful only if it is a part of a larger picture: the reduction of violence, compliance with commitments undertaken at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit and the resumption of negotiations.

It is in this spirit that we are considering any action that might be taken by the Council. But the Council will be heard by the parties only if it is united. We should not judge the past. Rather, we should define a positive approach and facilitate the search for a solution to this tragedy, working together with Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Wang Yingfan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Yesterday the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Shimon Peres, and the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, Ambassador Al-Kidwa, separately briefed the Council on the latest developments in the Palestinian-Israeli situation and presented their respective views. Today, at the request of some of the Council members, the President organized this open debate. This has positive significance for the United Nations efforts to promote the peace process in the Middle East.

At present, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues. It has not only aggravated the suffering of civilians and deepened hatred and hostility on both sides, it has also brought grave consequences for the peace process and regional security in the Middle East. If this situation is allowed to continue, the Palestinian and Israeli efforts, as well as the efforts made by the international community, which have yielded good results, might come to nothing.

The Council has been following the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the peace process in the Middle East. In order to restore and maintain peace and security in the Middle East, the Council has made many positive efforts. The proposal to send an observer mission to the ground has received wide support. The proposed observer mission is intended to ease and pacify the ongoing violence, which is in the interest of both parties. It must be pointed out that the understanding, cooperation and support of the Israeli side will be essential for the smooth deployment of the observer mission and its subsequent successful implementation of its mandate.

We continue to hope that the Israeli side will consider positively this proposal. At the same time, we also hope that the Secretary-General will continue to play a positive role in maintaining close contacts with both sides and will urge both sides to exercise restraint, demonstrate flexibility and seek solutions that are acceptable to both sides to stop the violence and resume peace talks.

We have noted that the new Israeli Government has indicated that achieving peace has become a central task and it has particularly emphasized that peace should be achieved with words instead of bullets. The leaders of both sides have recently indicated their wish to resume peace talks, and this has provided a fresh opportunity to restore the peace process. This opportunity must be seized, for it could easily be missed. We hope that both parties will consider their long-term interests, make sound judgements about the general climate, seize the opportunity and translate their positive political will into concrete actions as early as possible.

China has consistently, positively and actively supported the peace process in the Middle East. We strongly believe that achieving peace and stability in the Middle East is a common aspiration of the people of the region. It is in the fundamental interest of all the countries of the region. It is also in the interest of the international community, including China.

The peace process in the Middle East has now entered a very critical period. The immediate priority is for Palestine and Israel to stop the violence and resume peace talks. The relevant United Nations resolutions on the Middle East, particularly resolution 242 (1967) and resolution 338 (1973), which were adopted unanimously by the Security Council, and the land-for-peace principle, which has been universally recognized by the international community, are the basic guidelines for achieving peace. It is imperative that the parties concerned implement fully and effectively the agreements concluded and commitments undertaken. This is a realistic way to stop the violence and get the Middle East peace process out of its present deadlock. China is ready to work with the international community and will, as always, contribute its own efforts towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East at an early date.

Mr. Cunningham (United States): The situation in the Middle East is exceedingly precarious. We all realize that. In this highly combustible atmosphere, the international community needs to consider both its words and its actions very carefully. We should concentrate on developing ways to initiate, encourage and support the parties' own efforts to end the violence, to restore confidence and to return to negotiations.

Unfortunately, violence breeds violence; actions breeds reaction; mistakes are made; and tensions mount. We wish it were otherwise, but violence cannot and will not be halted from the outside. Nor will it be ended by charges and counter-charges and heated rhetoric.

Yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres met with the Security Council and conveyed several important points. First, he underscored that security for Israelis and Palestinians depended on the two parties, not outside forces or an international presence. Secondly, he reminded us that peace cannot be imposed and asked the Council to support peace, not one side or the other. As Ambassador Wang and others have pointed out in our discussion already, both sides say that they want the dialogue, the peace process, to go forward. We should be encouraging that and not make it more complicated by inopportune action by the Council outside of a context that foresees a result that the parties agreed to.

Mr. Peres reaffirmed the commitment of the Government of Israel to the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings and to the Mitchell fact-finding commission, inviting them to conduct a thorough review of the situation. That is certainly a welcome step. He informed us that the commission will be in Israel next week and urged the Council to postpone deliberations on next steps until we have a report from that body. He also confirmed that Prime Minister Sharon will be in New York on 21 March to meet the Secretary-General. We welcome these ongoing efforts and the new Israeli Government's engagement with the United Nations.

We want the Security Council to support peace and dialogue. It cannot do so if it acts precipitously. It can only do so in support of both Israel and the Palestinians. The United States remains firmly committed to ensuring that the Council does not adopt any resolution that is not supported by both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Last December the Council wisely decided not to adopt a resolution calling for the premature establishment of an international presence in the region. The Council sent a clear and unmistakable signal at that time. The message was simple and clear. It was that we all look forward to a time when the parties reach an agreement and turn to the Council for support and assistance in implementing it. It is entirely possible that an international presence that has an achievable mandate will be a part of that implementation effort. At that time of prospective peace, the United States will join with the rest of the Council in giving full support to the parties' own efforts to secure the final blessings of peace.

Much as we may hope otherwise, the road to peace does not begin in this Chamber. It must begin anew in the region. The Council has already expressed its support for an end to all the violence and a return to dialogue. For now, the Council's mission, and indeed the mission of every member of the United Nations, must be to encourage the parties to end the violence, to come together in peaceful negotiations and to make the difficult choices necessary to reach a final status agreement. Suggesting that the Council can somehow impose itself between the parties and play a constructive role by observing violence only serves to divert the parties from the absolute necessity to meet and shape their shared destiny, which is a just and lasting peace that provides security and dignity to Palestinians and Israelis alike. The United States Government is committed to that goal.

Sir Jeremy Greenstock (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): It is right that the Council should be addressing the situation in the Middle East, because there is widespread and deep concern across the United Nations membership at the continuing violence, at the closures of the occupied territories and the isolation of towns and villages within them. Above all, there is profound anxiety at the deteriorating prospects for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, which have implications well beyond the borders of Israel and the Palestinian areas.

The situation today is grim. Many roads inside Gaza and the West Bank are still closed, today. In the last two days, two Palestinians have died at checkpoints, delayed on their way to hospital. Thanks to the continued closure of Gaza airport, thousands of Palestinian pilgrims cannot return from Mecca. Tension is increasing, and that is a matter of immediate and international concern.

The Council has to live up to its responsibility to address peace and security in this region as elsewhere. We must find a way forward that improves the situation, not worsens it. We must find a way forward that provides the maximum unity in the Council, to guide the parties towards a peaceful course. The United Kingdom is ready to contribute to that effort.

The United Kingdom, in support of the European Union position which will later be set out in full by the Union presidency, has repeatedly pressed the Israeli Government to end the practices of closure and extrajudicial killings. The Israeli Government has told us that these measures are necessary for the protection of Israeli lives. But, in fact, these practices radicalize the Palestinian population and fuel violence in the occupied territories. Thus, they cannot achieve their stated purpose. We will continue to press the Israeli Government to end these practices, and in this regard I welcome the assurance by the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister yesterday to the Council that these measures would not comprise the policy of the new Israeli Government. We wish to see that fully put into effect.

A further step that needs to be taken is to resume the payments of revenues withheld from the Palestinian Authority. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority itself must make good-faith efforts to end the violence and to restore security cooperation.

So what needs to be done right away? Both parties must take urgent steps to reduce the violence and build confidence between them. Both parties must pursue contacts between them, for example, to make real progress in security cooperation. There is in reality no alternative to the parties themselves deciding to arrest the current cycle of violence and return to the path of negotiations. But the record — not least the melting away of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement — shows that they need help. That should be the purpose of any action the Council decides to take. We should always be thinking of how to improve conditions on the ground, for people on both sides. We should explore proposals that can achieve that goal.

We continue to believe, with France, Ireland, Norway and others, that an observer presence in the occupied territories could be beneficial, but that this can only be achieved with the acceptance of both parties. This issue should not be allowed to become a totem, dividing the parties and, still worse, the Security Council. It is the responsibility both of those who are traditionally supportive of Palestinian positions and of those traditionally supportive of Israeli positions to make a real effort to prevent such a harmful division occurring.

We have all made clear to the parties our conviction that an observer force could be useful. The parties bear the primary responsibility to agree how this might be possible. Our aim should be to encourage them to work together, not to polarize disputes and perpetuate the breakdown in constructive dialogue.

The Council has a challenge before it. We have to make this a common endeavour: how to maximize the prospects for renewed negotiations; how to help the parties move back from violence; and how we can give them practical support on the ground.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): It is almost a decade since the first Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid in 1991. At the time, we were filled with hope and expectations. For the first time the two sides recognized each other's right to exist and vowed to work together towards peace.

Over the last six months, the situation in the Middle East has deteriorated dramatically. The situation is critical, both in terms of the overall security situation and the level of violence and acts of terrorism. We have also seen a worsening of the human rights situation, the living conditions for the Palestinians and the fiscal situation for the Palestinian Authority.

There is no alternative to peace. In our view, the peace process is the only viable way of resolving the difference between the parties. However, it will take a lot of time and effort to bring the peace process back on track. Building a sustainable peace means finding a balance of interest and establishing mutual trust between the parties. If the Security Council is to play a constructive role in order to achieve this aim, we need a common approach and a common platform. The priority at this stage should be to halt the violence and to stabilize the situation. Furthermore, we should strongly encourage confidence-building measures, in order to re-establish the dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians. The Security Council should be a bridge-builder and should strive to achieve the broadest possible agreement on issues related to peace and security in the region.

Norway has repeatedly urged the parties to resume the negotiations and to renew their dialogue on security issues. We have also called on both Israel and the Palestinians to bring an end to violence. While we understand Israel's security needs, Israel must also respect the safety and security of the Palestinians. Furthermore, we have urged the Israeli Government to lift the closure of the West Bank and Gaza and to transfer the outstanding tax revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority. We have also called on Israel to freeze settlement activities.

The basis of any solution to the present crisis must be Security Council resolutions 242 (1967)and 338 (1973)and other relevant United Nations resolutions. Norway also wants to stress that the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war, is fully applicable to the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We urge Israel as the occupying Power to comply with its legal obligations and responsibilities under the said Convention.

Norway supports the idea of an international observer presence. If such a presence is to play a meaningful role, it must have the full support of both parties. We therefore call on the Secretary-General to continue his consultations with the parties to ascertain when and within what framework such a presence might appropriately be established in the area.

The Sharm el-Sheikh fact-finding committee, of which the Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorbjorn Jagland is a member, is due to visit Israel and the Palestinian area next week. In our view, the committee can play a moderating role in the present situation and assist in charting the way ahead.

Norway believes that the Security Council has a clear role to play in the continuing quest for peace in the Middle East. We should do what we can to bring the parties back to the negotiating table and bring the present situation of violence and bloodshed to an end.

Mr. Ryan (Ireland): I wish to associate my delegation fully with the statement to be made shortly by the Permanent Representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

Ireland has long desired a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We believe this can only be brought about on the basis of an agreement that respects Israel's right to peace and security and, at the same time, secures the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. It is greatly regretted that the hard work to achieve a final status agreement solution during the lifetime of the previous Israeli Government did not bear fruit and that once again the Palestinian territories have been engulfed in violence.

There are deep differences regarding the causes of, and responsibility for, the violence. It is clear, however, that the current phase of violence arises primarily out of the frustration to which long years of occupation have given rise. The Foreign Ministers of the European Union, in their ministerial declaration of 15 November last, pointed out that the lack of progress achieved in the peace process, including on the problem of the settlements, lies at the heart of the Palestinian people's frustration and of the violence.

My authorities were concerned and horrified at the widespread use of lethal force against Palestinians and at the failure to use non-lethal methods that are so readily available, especially in the early stages of the current disturbances. Last October, the Council quite properly condemned the excessive use of force, in resolution 1322 (2000). The European Union warned at that time that the disproportionate use of force would only aggravate the situation further. This warning was not heeded and was, unfortunately, vindicated by the tragic events which followed.

I wish to stress that we also condemn in the strongest terms the ongoing attacks on Israeli people. They are utterly wrong in themselves and they will do nothing to bring about the justice desired and deserved by the Palestinian people.

The current situation has given rise to a particularly vicious nexus of problems that have very serious political, economic, social and moral ramifications. There is the mounting violence, the failure on both sides to live up to the commitments made at Sharm el-Sheik, the collective punishments, the closures and restrictions on movement, the resultant devastating impact on the Palestinian people and on the Palestinian economy, the disastrous financial situation of the Palestinian Authority, the increasing terrorism, the extrajudicial killings, and the receding prospect for Israel of secure and recognized borders and acceptance in its region. I have enumerated these matters not with the purpose of holding either of the parties up to obloquy, but rather to emphasize the dimensions of the problem, its international character, and the responsibility of the Security Council in relation to it.

There is a clear and urgent need for a committed return to the negotiating process. This requires positive action. It requires engagement, not disengagement. It requires the full support of all around this table and of all Members of the United Nations. The message that goes out from this debate must not be one of negativity or barren recrimination. Reprehensible actions must be condemned by the Council: that is no more than our duty. But beyond that, there is a need to be forward-looking and to offer understanding, encouragement and support.

Yesterday we heard from Deputy Prime Minister Peres of the Israeli Government's decision to ease the closures and blockades and to enable the restoration of some normality to the lives of the Palestinian people. We welcome this positive decision, and we will watch developments in this regard carefully. We heard, too, that the Israeli Government would now cooperate with the fact-finding mission. This is also important and positive, and we look forward to the follow-through. We will also follow this process, carefully.

More is needed. The revenues due to the Palestinian Authority must be restored to it. It is simply not in the interests of peace, and it cannot be in the interest of Israel itself, for the financial and institutional situation of its interlocutor to be undermined and possibly destroyed.

There is a need to re-establish continuity in the peace process. No partner should be asked to accept a situation where it is obliged every so often to restart negotiations from a different position. It is self-evident that this cannot make for a viable and stable process.

The Security Council a long time ago established the basis for a solution in the form of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). For a long time — since the establishment of the Madrid principles and especially since the Oslo Agreement — the Council has stood aside and left it to the parties, with the assistance of mediators, to advance the peace process and to achieve a final settlement on a basis that meets the essential interests of all sides.

The peace process has been in difficulties before. This time, however, the difficulties are so grievous and the international ramifications so potentially grave that my Government are convinced that the Council must again look closely at all elements of the situation and work to help the parties to resolve the conflict.

The proposal for an international observer mission, which has been raised by a number of delegations, has the potential to help the parties in the current situation. I would appeal to the Israeli delegation and the Israeli authorities not to characterise this proposal as something it is not, and was never intended to be. There is no suggestion that this observer mission could prevent individual acts of terrorism. There is no question of it interposing itself between opposing forces or being able to stop a riot. Neither can it reasonably be regarded as an incitement to violence. The fear has been expressed that the presence of observers would induce Palestinians to stage violent events with the aim of provoking repressive action. On the contrary, unlike television cameras, experienced international military and police observers would readily detect riots, stone-throwing or other forms of violence that are mounted with the object of inducing repression and would report accordingly to all sides concerned.

The Ambassador of Singapore perhaps put it best at yesterday's private meeting when he said that a monitoring mission could act as a catalyst in breaking down the psychological barriers to a resumption of the peace process. Deputy Prime Minister Peres in fact referred in stark terms to these psychological barriers yesterday. It goes without saying that it is very important that any such measure is formulated so as to receive the widest possible support in the Council.

I was very pleased to hear this morning the welcome expressed by the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the meeting yesterday between Deputy Prime Minister Peres and the Security Council. I agree with Ambassador Al-Kidwa that this was good and that Mr. Peres is indeed a veteran politician. Israel's engagement with the Council was a most welcome development. We hope and believe that this should lead to an ongoing framework for engagement and cooperative dialogue with Minister Peres and his Government. It is of the highest importance that it should do so. In this regard, we look forward very much to Prime Minister Sharon's forthcoming meeting with the Secretary-General.

I very much hope that Mr. Peres yesterday, and Israeli people in general today, will take from the tenor of our discussions the message that the United Nations and the Security Council seek only to promote peace between Israel and its neighbours. If we have pointed to some hard facts, it is solely with the objective of promoting necessary careful reassessment of certain practices that, in our considered judgement, are obstacles to peace. We suggest that it is in Israel's own overall national interest to do so. We suggest careful assessment of our comments and advice on that basis.

Ireland, for its part, will seek to encourage and support action by the Council that will make a real contribution to ending the tragic conflict between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, which has disfigured the entire region for far too long.

Mr. Valdivieso (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome this opportunity to exchange opinions on the situation of the occupied territories, which is a matter of great concern to my delegation and, as we have seen from today's debate, to the entire international community.

Yesterday we had the opportunity to listen to Mr. Shimon Peres, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel. We would like to thank him for having been the one to ask to come to convey to the members of the Security Council the views of the new Government of Israel on the current situation. At yesterday's meeting we had an opportunity to convey to Mr. Peres and to the Permanent Observer of the Palestine the views of the members of the Council on the situation of the occupied territories. We hope that both parties also listen to what the other Members of the Organization think about the situation in Palestine.

The current wave of violence is lamentable, given the fact that a few months ago the parties were very close to reaching an agreement. The history lesson is clear: we should take advantage of opportunities for peace, and we should bear in mind that it is easier to erode a peace process than it is to build one. The current wave of violence is unacceptable because it takes the region back to the situation that prevailed nearly 10 years ago.

A great deal has been said about the disproportionate Israeli response to what was initially a street protest by young people throwing stones. Violence breeds further violence. That violence takes on a momentum of its own that later is more difficult to stop. In this regard, we would like to call on all the parties to take all necessary steps to end the violence and bring the situation back to normal so as to be able to resume negotiations on a basis acceptable to all.

It is crucial that financial remittances be resumed, as there is a risk of strangling the Palestinian economy — something that would have unforeseeable humanitarian consequences and could eventually lead to an escalation of violence.

The parties should determine the basis for discussions while taking into account the progress previously achieved. In addition, the leadership of the Palestinian Authority should be maintained. In summary, it is necessary to return to the path of cooperation in order to improve security and make possible the restoration of a minimum level of trust to end the current wave of violence and re-establish the conditions that will enable progress towards a definitive agreement.

The volatility of the situation in the Middle East is well known. Current events clearly pose a threat to international peace and security. In that regard, it is necessary that the Security Council continue its permanent review of the situation in order to comply with its responsibilities.

My delegation believes that an international presence under the auspices of the United Nations would be a catalyst for the restoration of peace in the occupied territories. We hope that today's deliberations will send clear signals about the unanimous expectations and wishes of the community of nations for peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Maiga (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I would like to express my gratitude to you, Mr. President, for convening this public meeting of the Security Council to debate the serious violent situation that continues to prevail in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Mali is keenly concerned at the continuing violence in the occupied Palestinian territories. We believe that unless these tragic events are dealt with quickly, they will be a real threat to peace and security in the entire Middle East.

Mali firmly condemns acts of repression and the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli army that has claimed over 437 victims, mostly among Palestinian civilians. Likewise, we consider Israel's frequent recourse to collective punishment and its use of all types of restrictions against the population of the territories to be counterproductive. The blockade of the territories has made the daily life of the Palestinians a genuine nightmare and has also caused considerable economic losses.

No legitimate struggle, even against terrorism, which we condemn terrorism in all its forms, can justify the imposition of such measures. We urge all of the parties to demonstrate restraint and moderation, to refrain from acts of provocation and to work together for the return of calm.

The present violence can end only with the signing of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace agreement based on the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the agreements signed by the parties. We consider that the Security Council has an essential role to play in this regard.

In accordance with the Charter, the Council has the obligation to work to establish confidence-building measures between the parties that can put an end to violence and restore a climate conducive to the resumption without conditions of negotiations on the final status of the territories.

In addition, my delegation believes that it is Israel's obligation to ensure respect for the holy sites and to guarantee the protection of the civilian Palestinian population.

Israel, the occupying Power, must strive to ensure scrupulous respect for the norms of international humanitarian law, as well as for the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Once again, we join Palestine in asking the Security Council for the speedy establishment of an international observer mission in the territories entrusted with ensuring the protection of civilians.

In this spirit, Mali fully supports the démarche of the non-aligned caucus and other members of the Council to hold discussions with the parties with a view to the prompt and effective deployment of observers in the field. We urge the Israeli Government to assist the international community in making this idea a reality, as a confidence-building measure for the good of both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

The situation is tragic, and we have been talking about a setback in the peace process at a time when a peace agreement was within reach. Nevertheless, there are grounds for hope. This is why my delegation welcomes the decision taken by the Israeli Government, announced to us yesterday by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, to start to lift the internal blockade between Palestinian cities in order to make the daily life of the civilian population less difficult. This is a positive measure that could contribute significantly to improving the living conditions of the inhabitants of the territories and mitigate the present level of violence. Beyond that measure, which we once again hail, what we are expecting from Israel is the end of the blockade of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in order to allow Palestinians to enter Israel to go to work.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the support of my delegation for the efforts made by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to bring the parties closer in order to bring about a resumption of the peace process. We also request the international community to provide the needed humanitarian and economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

Mr. Neewoor (Mauritius): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for holding this important meeting of the Security Council to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We believe that this meeting requested by the Arab League is appropriate and very timely for the following reasons.

First, the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which was halted several months ago as it moved into the final rounds towards a negotiated settlement, remains stalled, with no visible prospect for early resumption.

Secondly, the violence between Palestinians and Israelis, which started in September last year and which has already taken a heavy toll of lives on both sides, particularly among the Palestinians, continues, albeit at a lesser level but with no end in sight, and clouds the prospects for negotiations to start again.

Thirdly, the blockade of the Palestinian territories by Israel is inflicting untold suffering on the Palestinian people, who not only are deprived of their freedom of movement but are also unable to earn their normal livelihood. It also imposes great economic and financial hardship on the Palestinian Authority by denying essential revenues to which it is entitled.

Fourthly, in Israel a new Government under the leadership of Mr. Ariel Sharon was sworn into office last week following the recent elections, and Israel should be in a position again to resume negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.

In the atmosphere of the continuing stalemate, more than enough violence has occurred, with the loss of many precious lives. The stalemate must end, and negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority must resume without further delay. We believe that the international community should do all it can to encourage the two sides to get back to the task of negotiating a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question. The Security Council in particular must assume its responsibility in this regard.

The Security Council had the opportunity to hear Mr. Shimon Peres, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, yesterday afternoon, and we were reassured by his statement that peace is at the centre of the policies of the new Israeli Government. The Council also heard yesterday the Ambassador of the Observer Mission of Palestine, Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, who also reaffirmed the commitment of the Palestinian Authority to peace in the Middle East. According to Mr. Peres, it is high emotions rather than politics that are preventing the peace process from moving forward.

The other reason given in this regard by Mr. Peres is the continuation of violence. Ambassador Al-Kidwa, on the other hand, gave the Council a vivid picture of the frustration of the Palestinian people and their suffering under Israel's occupation and blockade.

We would like to say to both the Israelis and the Palestinians that the two peoples have only one destiny, and that is peaceful coexistence in mutual trust. There is no other option, and to search for one is supremely futile. It has been so in the past; it is so now; and it will be so in the future. The right of the Palestinian people to an independent State is unquestionable, and so is the right of the Israelis to exist as a nation with secure borders. The rest are matters of detail that the two sides must work out at the negotiating table in a spirit of mutual accommodation, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Israel has been insisting that all violence must end before negotiations can resume. In our view, the best and surest way to end the ongoing cycle of violence is to deploy a United Nations observer force in the occupied territories. This was suggested yesterday to Mr. Shimon Peres by several delegations, including Mauritius, in the Security Council. We hope the Israeli Government will respond favourably to this important proposal. The Security Council will shortly consider a draft resolution on the Middle East that must include such a proposal, and my delegation will fully support the adoption of the draft resolution by the Council.

Last but not least, I wish to emphasize that the starting point for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority should be where the negotiations stood when the two sides last met. It took a long time and enormous patience and skill on both sides for the negotiations to reach that critical point from the early beginnings of the Oslo process. The important gains already achieved must be preserved and should constitute the foundation for future negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Mahbubani (Singapore): The Charter gives the Security Council primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. By exercising this global role, the Security Council can promote the observance of international law, which guides the conduct of States.

As a small State, Singapore has an interest in strengthening the role of international law and thus in a strong and effective Security Council. This includes the implementation of all — I repeat, all — Security Council resolutions, including those fulfilling the Council's obligation to protect civilians in armed conflict, as declared in several resolutions and presidential statements, including resolution 1314 (2000) of 11 August 2000. The Council should live up to the standards that it has set for itself. Most importantly, resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the most recent resolution on this item, resolution 1322 (2000), must be implemented.

Yesterday, the Security Council had the opportunity of meeting with the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Mr. Shimon Peres, and the Permanent Observer of Palestine in separate private meetings. We welcome this acknowledgement of the Security Council's role. At these meetings, Council members sent a clear message about their concerns over the mounting and continuing violence, particularly Israel's widespread use of disproportionate force and the blockade of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which, as several speakers have noted today, have had profound effects on the Palestinian people. It is therefore timely for the Security Council to now listen to the views of the other members of the international community.

Over the long term, the protection of civilians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank can be granted only if peace negotiations are put back on track. We welcome the assurances of Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres and the Permanent Observer of Palestine, Ambassador Nasser Al-Kidwa, that peace remains their strategic objective. We hope that many of the elements of previous attempts at peace negotiations can be picked up from where they were left off.

To make this possible, our immediate priority must be to stop the violence. Having chosen peace as their strategic objective, we call on all parties to renounce violence. The primary responsibility for stopping the violence and for creating conditions conducive to peace negotiations being resumed as soon as possible clearly falls on the parties involved. The Security Council can help them to fulfil this responsibility by introducing neutral and objective confidence-building measures.

One of the proposals that the Security Council is actively discussing is the establishment of a United Nations observer force. We believe that an impartial and neutral international presence can serve as a confidence-building measure to change the psychological atmosphere in the occupied territories and help to neutralize the environment. As Ambassador Richard Ryan of Ireland noted earlier, we said yesterday that such a force can play a vital catalytic role by reducing the level of violence and by changing the chemistry of the troubled region. We note that the Ambassador of Colombia also referred to the possible catalytic role of such a force. We believe that such a force will complement the role that Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his representatives on the ground, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Mitchell fact-finding commission established by the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement can all play in trying to defuse the immediate crisis.

Singapore would therefore like the Council to further explore how such a proposal for an observer force can be operationalized. One way of doing so is to task the Secretary-General with consulting with all the parties. Another possibility is for the Security Council to despatch its own mission to the region. Since the Security Council has hosted visits by both President Yasser Arafat and Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres in recent months, it should reciprocate these gestures by sending its own team to continue these useful and constructive dialogue.

Now more than ever, we believe that all the parties involved and the international community should take bold steps towards putting the Middle East back on the road of peace. We should build on existing peace agreements and the truce framework, and not undermine them. Every accord that we have reached on the Middle East — the Camp David accords, the Madrid Conference, the Oslo peace agreements — represents crucial a step forward. We have some strong foundations and we should build on them.

Mr. Ahsan (Bangladesh): We, too, are grateful to you, Sir, for scheduling this important and timely meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and East Jerusalem has been deteriorating for some time now. Mindless violence continues and the defenceless Palestinian population bears the brunt, with hundreds dead, thousands injured and properties destroyed. My delegation would like to express sincere condolences to the families of the victims.

Excessive use of force has fuelled the dangerous escalation of violence. The policy of collective punishment, inflicted by Israel through the imposition of a blockade and closures, is crippling the economy. This has caused intense hardship, unemployment and deprivation. The net result has been a worrisome crisis of confidence, leading to what the Secretary-General has characterized as the unravelling of the progress that had been made between Israelis and Palestinians in moving towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

The Security Council cannot watch this situation continue, as it only strengthens those who do not want peace. We believe, first of all, that further escalation of violence must be prevented. The onus is on those who insist on using lethal force on civilians. The commitment to peace has to be demonstrated in practice by reversing these actions on the ground. As the situation deteriorates, the Security Council must re-engage itself and continue to explore a way out of this crisis, which is truly an international one, as the Ambassador of the United Kingdom reaffirmed today. We believe that the proposal to establish an international observer force is a good basis for the Council's deliberations and we fully support it.

In our view, the Council is unanimous on the need for the immediate and unconditional lifting of the economic blockade. We agree with the Secretary-General that donor assistance is absolutely critical to alleviating the hardship of the Palestinian population. We appreciate the role that the European Union has played in this regard and encourage it to continue its assistance.

Nobody is under the illusion that the negotiation of a final settlement is easy. However, the parties must be encouraged to continue efforts to achieve their objective through peaceful negotiation. We also believe that it is important to preserve the gains made by the painful efforts of both sides to date and to build upon that. The initiative of the Deputy Prime Minister of Israel to come to the Council was appreciated by all here yesterday. We believe that it is a clear recognition by Israel of the Council's role in this issue. That role is as relevant today as it was at the time of the adoption of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which together constitute the framework for a final settlement.

Bangladesh strongly supports the Secretary-General's role in facilitating the Sharm el-Sheikh understanding. We believe that he can also play a constructive role in helping both sides return to the negotiating table. The Security Council must work towards that end.

Miss Durrant (Jamaica): Mr. President, let me join others in thanking you for convening this public meeting of the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. This has given members and non-members of the Council an opportunity to review developments over the last six months.

Today the plight of the Palestinians in the occupied territories has reached desperate proportions, further threatening the stability of the whole region and thereby posing a threat to international peace and security.

Yesterday the Council held two very important meetings which provided a useful backdrop to today's discussions. First, the Council met with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the new Government of Israel, Shimon Peres, at his request. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs outlined his Government's perspective on the problems bedeviling the people of Palestine and of Israel. He outlined what he saw as the basis for restarting the peace process between the Palestinians and the Israelis, and outlined actions contemplated and to be taken by Israel in this regard.

The Jamaican delegation welcomes the steps announced by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs to open up avenues of commerce and to begin to reverse a policy which has revisited economic devastation on the Palestinians. We expect to see early results on the ground, reflected in an improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinians.

Immediately after the meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Security Council met with Ambassador Al-Kidwa, the

Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations. He shared with us the Palestinians' perspective on the prevailing conditions in the Palestinian territories. He confirmed for us much of what has been reported over the past few months and gave us reasons why the peace process has been derailed. My delegation expressed the hope that yesterday's meetings would usher in a new era of relations between the United Nations, the Palestinians and the Israelis in the search for peace.

While both sides clearly saw the causes and effects differently, they both made it absolutely clear that they both wanted peace and that they wanted to end the cycle of violence and coexist as good neighbours. However, for many complex and varied reasons, they have been unable to achieve that peace of which they spoke, and, despite several hopeful attempts, the peace which they have sought for many years has eluded them.

My delegation believes that the Security Council must offer its help and its support for the peace process. Jamaica has in the past urged both the Palestinians and the Israelis to seek peace through an active negotiating process, a process which requires them to stay the course, no matter the obstacles that may confront them. As we have stated on previous occasions, recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination must be a principal element of this process. The right to security of all countries in the region, including that of Israel, must also be assured. We reiterate this position today. Jamaica offers its continued support in efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace within the framework of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Last October the Security Council adopted resolution 1322 (2000), which called for the immediate cessation of violence and for all necessary steps to be taken to ensure that the cycle of violence is brought to an end. We urged the parties to refrain from new and provocative actions and to work towards a situation of normalcy in a way that promoted the prospects of peace. We gave full support to the important role of the Secretary-General in the peace process. We condemned the acts of violence, especially the excessive use of force against Palestinians. We called upon Israel to abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and its responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. We stressed the importance of establishing a mechanism for a speedy and objective inquiry into the violent events. The Mitchell commission was subsequently established, but so far no results have been seen of its inquiry. Yesterday, however, Mr. Peres advised us that the commission had been invited to visit Israel next week. We look forward to positive results from that visit.

Last October, the then Prime Minister of Israel and the President of the Palestinian Authority made commitments to Secretary-General Kofi Annan to resolve their differences by peaceful means. We saw this as a very important development. Those of us who desire to see peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis welcomed the brave actions contemplated by the parties and dared to hope that, at long last, there was the requisite political will to end the conflict. In the wake of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit and the agreement reached, we had hoped that further loss of life would be avoided. The peoples of Palestine and of Israel no doubt saw a glimmer of hope in the decisions taken at that time by their leaders.

Needless to say, my delegation has been very disappointed by what has taken place since then. The Sharm el-Sheikh agreement has not been implemented; we have seen a drift further away from peace; many lives, particularly Palestinian lives, have been lost; and economic devastation has descended upon the Palestinian people. We are deeply concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories and the reported lack of access by humanitarian workers to those in need. We believe that all barriers to humanitarian relief reaching the Palestinian people must be removed without delay.

In light of this, and in spite of the intractable nature of the problems facing both sides, we maintain that, if the political will exists to make bold decisions for peace and to carry out those decisions, with the help of the Security Council and the United Nations as a whole, perhaps we can then move forward to bring peace to the peoples of the region.

In December, Jamaica supported the sending of United Nations observers to Palestine, a position which did not at that time receive the support of the majority of the members of the Security Council. We believed then, as we do now, that the deployment of United Nations observers could act as a deterrent to further violence and as a confidence-building measure between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

While we delay, the violence rages on, and many lives continue to be lost. As the Permanent Representative of Singapore reminded us, the Council has repeatedly expressed its concern about the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Other members of the Council have spoken today of some of the things that the Security Council should and must do. We are almost in unanimity that action by the Security Council is urgently needed. While we have not yet achieved unanimity on what needs to be done and how, we are working to achieve this. We join others who support revisiting the issue of the deployment of United Nations observers in Palestine. We join other members of the Council in calling for Israel to act immediately to remove all economic blockades and closures, and to take decisive action to restore the economic viability of the Palestinian territories. We reiterate our call to both sides to bring an end to the violence and to sit down together, face to face, and to resume negotiations.

Over the course of the next few days, the Security Council will be working on a draft resolution to reflect the concerns expressed in this meeting and to give meaning to the aspirations for peace in the Middle East. We urge all parties to show the maximum flexibility and to assist us in this endeavour.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Ukraine.

Today's formal meeting of the Security Council — the third during the past two days to address the dangerous crisis in the Middle East — and the considerable number of speakers participating in the deliberations testify not only to the gravity of the situation but also to the active efforts by the Council to contribute to easing tension and defusing the present crisis.

My country remains deeply concerned at the current deterioration in the Middle East, which has been going on for more than five months. We are alarmed by daily reports of continued clashes between Israelis and Palestinians, which have already claimed the lives of more than 400 people, most of whom are Palestinians, with thousands wounded. We mourn the victims of this bloodshed and express our sincere condolences to their bereaved families.

As has been stated by my delegation on many previous occasions, Ukraine condemns the excessive and indiscriminate use of force against Palestinian civilians. Any attacks or reprisals against the civilian population are legally prohibited and inadmissible. Full respect for the Fourth Geneva Convention should be ensured.

We are of the firm view that Israel has to lift its economic blockade against Palestinians as soon as possible, since it has placed the Palestinian Authority on the verge of economic collapse and has simply doubled, if not tripled, the number of the Palestinian protesters. Evidently, the continuation of the settlement activities on Palestinian territory is not helping to remedy the situation either.

Proceeding from this stand, we are encouraged by the recent decision of the new Government of Israel to start lifting the economic closure of the Palestinian territory, as well as its intentions to stop the settlement activities in it.

Likewise, my country recognizes the legitimate right of Israel to live within secure and internationally recognized borders. Ukraine absolutely rejects any acts of terrorism, by whomsoever committed, by anyone as a means of reaching any political goal. In our view, any violent or provocative actions by radical elements should be halted resolutely since they lead only to a further escalation of violence. In this context, the acts of violence against the Israelis are equally condemned in my country.

It is our belief that under the current circumstances there is no alternative for the parties but to end any acts of violence against each other immediately and unconditionally, to overcome their animosity and, for the sake of peace, to come back to the negotiating table. At this juncture, we reiterate our appeal to the Israelis and the Palestinians to show maximum restraint and prudence and to refrain from any unilateral actions which could further aggravate the situation or pre-empt the outcome of the final status talks.

It is our conviction that both parties should resume their negotiations as soon as possible on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), including the principle of land for peace, as well as the principles laid down at the Madrid Conference and in the Oslo Agreement. Undoubtedly, the understandings reached at Sharm el-Sheikh last year should be implemented in full; the measures to restore effective cooperation between the sides in the field of security should be undertaken. We stress the importance of maintaining the direct Israeli-Palestinian contacts, including at the highest level.

In this regard, we took note with satisfaction of the news about the recent exchange of messages between the Palestinian leader and the new Prime Minister of Israel being done in a fairly constructive manner. What is important is that in their messages both leaders affirmed a mutual desire to achieve peace. It is our hope that these positive signals will undergo further development.

We also regard positively the new Government of Israel's seeking the establishment of closer dialogue with the Security Council, as was confirmed yesterday during the meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel Mr. Shimon Peres.

We continue to believe that in the current circumstances the international presence in the Palestinian territory may become an important factor contributing to the speedy restoration of security conditions and the resumption of talks. In our view, the idea of the establishment of the United Nations observer mission, as put forward by France, the United Kingdom and some others, responds to the interests of both Palestinians and Israelis and deserves to be seriously considered by the Council. At the same time, it is understandable that in practical terms this idea cannot be implemented without the cooperation of Israel, which should be encouraged to reconsider its current negative attitude to it.

Ukraine upholds the position that the Security Council should maintain its active involvement in the search for ways to halt the current crisis in the Middle East. My country will welcome the continuation of the constructive engagement of the Secretary-General in the efforts aimed at bringing peace and security to the region. In particular, we encourage the Secretary-General to pursue his mandate, conferred upon him by the Council last fall, to negotiate with the parties on the acceptable modalities of the United Nations observer mission.

It is also our hope that further activities of the fact-finding commission, as outlined in Security Council resolution 1322 (2000), and agreed upon at the summit meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh, will continue to play a positive role in bringing the level of violence down. We welcome the visit by the commission to the region next week, and we look forward to hearing the reports on the results of its findings in Israel and Palestine.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Ukraine's determination to contribute further to the process of restoring a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, which, in our view, will come about only with the realization of the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to their self-determination and statehood.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mauritania and Morocco, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Najad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr. Ould Deddach (Mauritania) and Mr. Snoussi (Morocco) took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: The next speaker on my list is the representative of Egypt. I invite him to take seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Aboulgheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. I have every confidence in your skill and wisdom as you conduct and steer the deliberations of the Council on this important subject, and I express the hope that the Security Council will carry out its role as set out in the Charter and in the manner that the international community desires in order to maintain security in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The essence of the crisis, whose destructive effects the occupied Palestinian territories have been experiencing for more than five months, lies in one main issue: the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, which is basically the detonator of all the bloody events that the world has been witnessing, events that have continued unabated since last September.

Israel can portray the issue in many guises. It can mix facts and point the finger of blame in all directions in order to come up with a single conclusion, according to which the occupied people, the people whose land is occupied, are equated with the occupying Power, which imposes on the occupied people a stifling siege aimed at starving them and bringing them to their knees. Despite all these rationalizations and misleading facts, the Council must not stray from the underlying reason behind the events. That is the reality of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory.

The facts tell us that the living conditions of the Palestinian people have not improved and will not improve, and that they will not enjoy stability until they are rid of the occupation in all its manifestations and forms.

Since the meeting of the Security Council to consider this issue on 22 November last year, there have been a number of successive political developments, not the least notable of which was the change of Government in Israel. Unfortunately, none of these developments have had the effect that some had hoped for in terms of reducing the scope, level and size of the military power and repression used by Israel against the Palestinian people. We can actually say that Israel has escalated its brutal treatment of the Palestinian people qualitatively since the new Government took office. This Government has chosen to implement a "suffocating siege" policy in the occupied territory, replacing what it called a "breathing siege" policy, which was said to have been in effect until a few days ago. We find these terms and descriptions not only disturbing but also, unfortunately, ludicrous.

For the information of the Council, such a siege of the occupied Palestinian territory means the transformation of every Palestinian city and village, including those under autonomous Palestinian control, into a large prison for its residents, a prison they are not allowed either to enter or leave. It also means the complete disruption of life and the strangulation of the Palestinians, who, I must say, deal with the whole situation with an uncommon bravery that earns the admiration of their Arab brethren and of free peoples throughout the world.

There is siege and closure, confiscation of land and demolition of homes, shelling of government and education facilities, and an organized policy to assassinate civilians without any regard for the norms of human rights observed throughout the world and without recourse to any judicial authority. Israeli civilian settlers, protected by a powerful military force, do whatever they wish in the Palestinian territory, attacking, stealing the Palestinians' water and burning their crops, all the while being defended by the Israeli army, which then proceeds to uproot trees that had existed for decades before Israel's establishment, using all the might of weaponry at its disposal to subjugate the Palestinians to Israel's will. It is the power of occupation.

All this activity transpires under one pretext Israel never ceases to repeat, presuming that it justifies all its actions: the pretext of security. I do not believe that this is anything more than an insult to our intelligence and to all that this Council stands for in terms of embodying the principles of law and human rights. Is it not strange that we are still listening to these pretexts after 10 years of negotiations without Israel being able to extend to the Palestinian people the only real concession required of it, which is to withdraw from their land, a land that it occupied by force in 1967?

Genuine security is a legitimate claim for all the peoples of the region. Nobody denies the right of any people to enjoy security. However, security cannot be obtained at the expense of one's own neighbours, and one cannot clamour for security while simultaneously killing the neighbours' children, demolishing their homes, strangling them and starving them. There is no logic to this, nor any justice.

Yesterday, 14 March, amid the current tense situation and bloody events, the report of the human rights inquiry commission established pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution S-5/1 of 19 October 2000, on human rights violations in the occupied territories, was issued (E/CN.4/2001/121). The report contains a detailed account of the tragic situation of the Palestinian people living under the repression of occupation. It outlines a set of important recommendations and conclusions. We urge the Council to examine them and to consider carrying them out. Perhaps the most important of these recommendations is contained in chapter X, part II of the report, and I quote from paragraph 11 of chapter X, part II:

(*spoke in English*)

> "An adequate and effective international presence needs to be established to monitor and regularly report on compliance by all parties with human rights and humanitarian law standards in order to ensure full protection of the human rights of the people of the occupied territories. Such an international mechanism should be established immediately and constituted in such a manner as to reflect a sense of urgency about protecting the human rights of the Palestinian people."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

The conditions in the occupied territories have deteriorated to an extent that compels the Council to intervene, with all the authority that it has under the Charter, to put an end to the arrogance of power with which the occupation force handles the Palestinians in the Palestinian territories. Given this, the Council must consider, without procrastination or delay, establishing and deploying the international monitoring force requested by the international community, the Palestinians and the Arab side several months ago.

We are aware that some countries are encouraging the parties to resume negotiations. We have no argument with that, but it is only fair and just that when the Council asks for the resumption of negotiations, they must be based on all previous negotiations and not start in a vacuum. They should have as a clear objective the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) within a defined and acceptable time frame.

We heard it reported that Israel said in this Chamber yesterday that it had committed itself to the principle of land for peace and that it had given land to some Arab parties and was never able to get anything except a cold peace from them. Everybody knows who is the subject of this contention. Egypt's answer to this is clear and unequivocal: the land that Egypt regained by wars, followed by negotiations, is Egyptian territory that was occupied by Israel. Peace among the two countries now is a peace governed by signed agreements, and nobody can doubt the extent to which Egypt is committed to these agreements, out of its sense of international responsibility. However, the temperature of the peace between two neighbouring peoples is based on the desire and will of these two peoples. It is only natural and logical that the Egyptian people would interact with the question of their Arab brethren whose land is occupied, and with the plight of the brotherly Palestinian people in particular.

When the Israeli approach to dealing with its neighbours is changed, when a real hand of peace is extended to them and when the Palestinian people have been liberated from Israeli occupation, only then can we open up and deal with the question of how warm or cold this peace is. At present, such talk is mere rhetoric. We can only describe this rhetoric as empty; it cannot change the facts on the ground.

Peace is everyone's objective. However, in the case of the Palestinian people the achievement of peace must be accomplished by Israel's respect for that people's rights to independence and to a dignified free life.

Before I end this intervention, I should like to direct my words to Ambassador Yehuda Lancry, the Ambassador of Israel.

(*spoke in English*)

Ambassador Yehuda Lancry, Ambassador of Israel, the problem again is the occupation. Today, I watched the BBC World at 7 o'clock in the morning. There were hundreds of Palestinians, women and children. They were in Ramallah. They were trying to demonstrate in a very peaceful manner. The response was bullets. The Israeli army was firing and shooting at civilians, those who were not even carrying rocks or stones. You will have peace with the Palestinians, but you will have that peace when you recognize that they are not inferiors, that their blood is as sacred as Jewish blood. You stop shooting at them. Your people are killing them and they count for nothing. The Palestinians are human beings and they are the equals of the Israelis.

The President: I thank the representative of Egypt for the kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list if the representative of Jordan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Al-Hadidi (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure at the outset, Mr. President, to extend our congratulations to you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I am confident that your wisdom, expertise and thorough knowledge will lead us to the desired success. I should also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Ben Mustapha, the Permanent Representative of Tunisia, for the marked efficiency with which he conducted the work of the Security Council during his presidency.

It gives me pleasure also to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this emergency meeting at the request of the Arab Group.

My delegation remains gravely concerned due to the deteriorating situation in the occupied Arab territories resulting from the continued Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and Israel's unjustified use of force that has assumed serious dimensions recently, thus threatening the stability and security of the region and the future of the peace process in its entirety.

My delegation reiterates its call to the international community to carry out its responsibilities vis-à-vis the suffering of the Palestinian people. We wish also to reiterate the necessity for concerted international action to halt acts of aggression against the Palestinians and to provide international protection to them through despatching an international observer force to the occupied territories under the auspices of the United Nations in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and with a view to preventing the recurrence of such aggression in the future.

In spite of the receding intensity of violence, the situation in the occupied territories is still extremely grave and tensions continue to rise. Israel must halt its use of force against the Palestinians and must lift the stifling economic blockade against Palestinian cities and villages. It must stop digging trenches around Palestinian cities and allow for normal communications between them, pay the financial entitlements of the Palestinian Authority without delay and return to the negotiating table with a view to implementing all agreements that have been concluded, including Sharm el-Sheikh, to put an end to this conflict.

The recent developments prove once again the urgent need for the Middle East to reach comprehensive and lasting peace and for Arab rights to be restored in their entirety, a matter that will not be realized without the application of the resolutions of international legitimacy.

In conclusion, we would like to reassert the need to focus on the revitalization of dialogue between the Israeli and the Palestinian parties and to bring the peace process back to its natural path with a view to realizing the desired objective, namely the establishment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

His Majesty the King of Jordan, the Jordanian Government and the Jordanian people reassert their solidarity with and support for their brotherly Palestinian people in its endeavour to regain its legitimate rights and to establish its own independent State on its territory, with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital. I should also like to express our heartfelt condolences to the Palestinian people and leadership for their fallen martyrs.

The President: I thank the representative of Jordan for the kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Yemen. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Al-Ashtal (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset, Mr. President, to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. We are confident that you will steer its deliberations to the desired success. I should also like to express our appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Said Ben Mustapha, Permanent Representative of Tunisia, for his personal efforts and for wisely and successfully guiding our deliberations last month.

I should also like to extend our deep thanks to you, Mr. President, and to the members of the Security Council for affording us the opportunity to discuss one of the oldest issues on the agenda of the United Nations, an issue that has lasted more than half a century, namely, the Palestinian question, which still awaits a just solution.

The current Israeli practices against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories are senseless, illogical and unbelievably harsh, cruel and gory. They have had catastrophic economic, social and human repercussions on the lives of civilians.

Of late, Israel has been dissecting Palestinian villages and cities, isolating Palestinian territories and cutting them off from each other and from the outside world. It has tightened its economic blockade against civilians and has refused to pay tax revenues due the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, settlements are being established, Palestinian homes are being destroyed and Palestinian families are being displaced. Excessive force is being used by regular army forces and trained security forces against children who are guilty only of refusing the continuing occupation of their land.

These are revealing indications of indiscriminate Israeli practices. They require the Council to shoulder its international responsibilities and take the necessary steps to urge Israel to respect the legitimate rights of the Palestinian peoples, in accordance with adopted international resolutions and with the principle of land for peace. In this context, we would ask that the Council accept the following points.

First, and most urgently, the Council should help put an end to violence against children and defenseless civilians. Secondly, the economic blockade should be lifted, barricades should be dismantled and the free movement of civilians should be guaranteed. Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority should be paid the tax revenues due it. These measures are desperately needed, which is why we ask the Council to exert pressure on Israel to implement them. They involve the lives of innocent civilians, whose suffering we witness daily and whose lives and property are fraught with danger, displacement and isolation.

On a different level, we request that the Council also take the following steps. The Council should agree to establish and deploy, in the occupied territories and under the aegis of the United Nations, an international force to protect the Palestinian people. Secondly, the Council should establish and deploy a fact-finding mission to look into Israeli practices against civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories. Palestinians need the presence of the United Nations; they need to have someone to report on what is happening in the occupied territories. This can only be achieved by dispatching a fact-finding mission to the region.

We in Yemen support the peace process in the Middle East. We believe it is an inescapable strategic choice. It is for that reason that we are calling for the resumption of negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties from the point where they left off.

The President: I thank the representative of Yemen for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Saudi Arabia. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to extend my congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. We are confident that your knowledge and experience will serve you in conducting the work of the Council in the manner to which we all aspire. I would also like to express our gratitude to our brother, the Permanent Representative of sisterly Tunisia, who conducted the work of the Council last month with wisdom and competence.

An examination of history will reveal many documents and testimonies accurately documenting all the massacres perpetrated by Israel against innocent Palestinian civilians — in Deir Yassin, Ayn Kibya, Gaza, Al-Husan, Qualquilya, Kafr Kassim, Khan Yunis, Rafa, Al-Quds, Ramallah and other cities and villages of Palestine. Israeli terrorism has even pursued Palestinians to Sabra and Shatila. The Mossad and its agents have pursued Palestinian personalities outside Palestine and have killed a large number of them. By admission of Israeli officials themselves, it is now known how those agents worked, and continue to work, to assassinate Palestinians using numerous terrorist methods, including bombing with helicopters and planes.

By deploying occupation forces around densely populated areas and Palestinian cities and villages, the Israeli authorities recently divided the West Bank into 43 sections and the Gaza Strip into four sections. This has led to greater isolation for those cities and villages, thereby limiting the movement of their citizens and deepening the suffocating economic blockade. This is an approach aimed at destroying the Palestinian entity from within, destroying the Palestinian economy and infrastructure and sabotaging national interests. This approach is also aimed at eradicating Palestinian society, which lives under blockade in geographical cantons in which Palestinians are separated from each other, from their brethren in the Arab world and from the outside world. Those inhumane and unjustified methods presage a dangerous deterioration in the security situation, add to the current tensions and demonstrate the true intentions of the new Israeli Government.

Israel describes the intifada as violence. It turns a blind eye to the fact that it is resistance to occupation, which is a legitimate right and, indeed, a national duty that has been exercised by all peoples to rid themselves of occupation and injustice. Current developments in occupied Palestine are not violence carried out by those who oppose peace, as Israel claims. No. They constitute a popular uprising that rejects surrender, the usurpation of the rights of Palestinians, the confiscation of Palestinian territory and the confinement of Palestinians to isolated areas where Israeli extremism is dominant and where they cannot even secure the basic necessities of life.

The Palestinian uprising is an expression and a reflection of the impatience of the Palestinians vis-à-vis the barrenness of the peace negotiations. The Palestinians have been offered so far the peace of time bombs, by which the Israeli side has insisted on imposing its conditions and adopting the approach of the victor towards the vanquished. Israel has discussed simple and commonsensical issues without talking about the basic issues — issues of destiny — to gain time and to impose new realities on the ground.

Whatever agreement is reached, Israel tries to empty it of its content. Israel prevaricates when it comes to making agreements and delays when it is asked to implement. The uprising has made the claims of Israel perfectly clear regarding its desire for peace. It has become obvious to the international community that Israel does not desire a peace based on justice and that it has no intention of recognizing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among which are the rights of return and self-determination and the right to establish an independent State, with Arab Jerusalem as its capital. Israel has showed no sincere and serious desire to establish a climate of confidence regionally and to coexist with its neighbours in security and peace.

The Commission on Human Rights sent a fact-finding mission led by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, in spite of all Israeli's attempts to mislead the Commission and its attempts to obstruct her movements by firing on her car to remind her of the fate of Count Bernadotte, who was assassinated by Zionist terrorist gangs. The Commission confirmed the suffering of the Palestinian people, their pain, their wounds and their continued tragedy.

The Palestinians have lost their territory; their houses have been demolished and they have experienced much suffering. Death has become a daily event for them. The father dies, and the son goes out the next morning carrying the picture of his martyred father. Then the son dies, and all of the fathers and mothers receive the hordes of people who come to pay their condolences.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia feels that Israel is the only party responsible for all these acts of aggression committed against the Palestinians. Therefore, we denounce and deplore all Israeli measures which run counter to all humane principles and all norms of the revealed religions and international law. We call upon the international community to prevail upon Israel to stop its continued aggression against Palestine and the Arabs.

The international community entrusted the Security Council with the task of maintaining international peace and security. The developments in occupied Palestine right now mean that the Security Council must assume its responsibility. It must adopt the necessary measures to protect the Palestinian people — to protect innocent children from the bullets of the occupiers, to protect the young people whose dreams die before they are even born and to protect mothers with tears in their eyes while they hold their dead sons and pray to God to rid them of the injustice of the occupiers.

The Council must adopt measures to protect the fathers and the elderly who have lost their sons and their grandsons to the occupation. It must do this to affirm the international responsibility of the United Nations vis-à-vis the question of Palestine, until it has been resolved in all its aspects. It must do this in implementation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, which applies to all territories occupied by Israel. It must do this in accordance with Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) and with the General Assembly resolution adopted during its emergency special session.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supports the Palestinian request that the Security Council assume its responsibility and implement its commitments to send an international observer force to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, to protect those who are still alive among the Palestinian civilian population. These are innocent people who only aim to recover their rights and to live like everybody else — like all nations, in peace, security and freedom.

Peace cannot be made through the hubris of the generals and their use of tanks and planes. It can be achieved only by accepting the terms of rights and by forcing the aggressor to stop its aggression and to end its occupation. Stability in the area is linked to the achievement of a comprehensive and just peace. The peace negotiations were based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. Just as peace cannot be dealt with piecemeal, the land cannot be partitioned either. In order for a just and comprehensive peace to be established, all Arab territories occupied since 1967 must be returned so that stability, security, understanding, coexistence and cooperation can be achieved.

The President: I thank the representative of Saudi Arabia for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Malaysia. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. Let me also join others in thanking you for your prompt response to the request, including from my delegation on behalf of the Islamic Group at the United Nations, for an urgent meeting of the Council to consider the grave situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Like other members of the international community, Malaysia continues to follow closely the grave developments there with the greatest of concern, in the fervent hope that the continuing violence will subside, thereby sparing the Palestinian people further needless deaths and injuries.

My delegation listened very carefully and with deep empathy to the statement made by the Permanent Observer of Palestine, to whom I am most grateful. I am also grateful to those speakers before me who have exposed the hostile and uncompromising policies maintained by successive Israeli Governments while they glibly talked about the need to have peaceful relations with their Palestinian and Arab neighbours.

Since 18 December 2000, when the Security Council failed to adopt a draft resolution that would have led to the establishment of a United Nations force comprising military and police observers to be dispatched throughout the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, nearly 100 more Palestinians have been killed and thousands injured. By some accounts, to date nearly 400 Palestinians have lost their lives in the continuing violence on the ground, mainly as a direct result of the excessive use of force by Israeli security forces. We believe that the additional loss of lives and injuries sustained by the Palestinians could have been prevented had the Council discharged its responsibilities and acted decisively on that day to establish the proposed United Nations observer or monitoring force.

It was for this purpose that my Minister of Foreign Affairs travelled to New York, along with several of his colleagues from the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), under the leadership of the Foreign Minister of Qatar, representing the Chairmanship of the OIC. My Minister and his colleagues addressed this Council and made a strong plea for the establishment of a United Nations protections force. They had hoped that their pleas would convince the Council to make the right decision. Regrettably, this was not the case and the draft resolution was voted down by a very slim margin.

Those members of the Council that abstained in the voting on the draft resolution last December argued that more time was needed to allow Israel and Palestine to arrive at an agreement between themselves over larger issues, which might include the establishment of such an observer force. My delegation argued that, by doing so, the Council would be subjecting the establishment of the United Nations force to the vagaries of a tortuous and uncertain peace process. We did not believe then, nor do we believe now, that the fate of such an important — indeed, indispensable — United Nations force should be subjected to these uncertainties. We believed instead that the establishment of a United Nations force would have calmed the situation and certainly would have prevented the needless deaths and injuries sustained by Palestinian civilians these last several months. It would have sent a powerful message to Israel of the serious concern of the Council and the international community over its use of excessive force in handling the situation. It would also have demonstrated, in a tangible way, the Council's concern and sympathy for the dire plight of the Palestinian civilians, the victims of the current situation. It would be most unfortunate indeed if, in spite of these past tragic events, the Council were to continue to do nothing and to bear witness to more deaths and injuries in the coming months.

Malaysia joins the rest of the international community in its indignation over Israel's continued reliance on the use of massive and unmitigated forceful response to individual outbreaks of Palestinian protest throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Protracted closures of the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem; tight restrictions on the movement of people and goods; the withholding of customs and tax incomes from the Palestinian Authority that rightfully belong to it; and other measures of collective punishment have had a disastrous effect on the Palestinian economy. These draconian and inhumane measures have made life for the Palestinians a daily struggle for sheer survival. They have, inevitably, increased tension, provoked further violence and led to a further crisis of trust and confidence between the two sides, thereby making it even more difficult for the peace process to be put back on track.

My delegation recalls that some members of the Council made the point then that the issue of the United Nations monitoring force was still on the table and could be revisited at a later date. We therefore call on the Council to reconsider the proposal and to act now, and decisively, to stop the killing of Palestinian civilians in the occupied Territories. It cannot afford to continue to sit on the sidelines and do nothing on the argument that it is for the two sides to resolve their problem, knowing full well that this is not likely to happen anytime soon, especially in the wake of the recent elections in Israel and the formation of a new Government headed by Mr. Ariel Sharon. Clearly, the onus lies with Mr. Sharon, who, as we all know, precipitated the crisis in the first place.

This urgent meeting of the Council should send a clear signal of the expectation of the Council and the international community of an immediate end of the violence, and the early despatch of a United Nations observer force to the occupied territories would be a concrete step in that direction. We do not subscribe to the argument made in this Chamber today that Council action on this proposal would interfere in the peace process. Arguments for non-action by the Council are as unconvincing and self-serving today as they were in the past. Surely, they cannot hope to convince anyone but the speakers themselves.

We believe, on the contrary, that the easing of tensions following the establishment of a United Nations observer force would contribute substantively to the peace process. It would create a climate that would be conducive to dialogue and negotiations. Continued tension through non-action by the Council would only exacerbate the situation and ensure the continuing spiral of violence.

This Council, which is quick to intervene in other conflict situations in order to protect civilians caught in armed conflict, cannot have a different set of standards in respect of the protection of Palestinian civilians. We believe that the establishment of a United Nations observer or monitoring force will be a concrete step in providing protection for them. The very credibility of the Council is at stake if nothing is done to deal with the situation immediately. Non-action by the Council, as advocated in some quarters, would be to consign the Palestinian issue and, in particular, the current grave situation in the occupied territories to continued neglect and indifference and to further cynical manipulation of the issue by Israel. My delegation is therefore encouraged to observe today the positive attitudes of most members of the Council on this important proposal.

May I conclude by expressing my delegation's deep and sincere appreciation for the diplomatic efforts undertaken by the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories. We thank him for his tireless efforts made towards what is likely to be a protracted process. We also support the efforts of the Secretary-General and continue to believe that such efforts can be pursued in parallel with those of the Council.

The President: I thank the representative of Malaysia for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Bahrain. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Buallay (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to see you, Sir, presiding over the Council this month. We greatly appreciate the efforts of the Permanent Representative of Tunisia during his presidency of the Council last month.

The Security Council is meeting today in the light of the extremely difficult conditions prevailing in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Children, youth and women are being killed daily. Grave violations of human rights are being committed. Occupied Palestinian cities are being subjected to a stifling blockade in order to starve their populations and to deny them basic sustenance. Israel is flouting the simplest and most basic international norms and laws.

Current events in the occupied Palestinian territories remind us of episodes from the First and Second World Wars, particularly those involving civilians and cities. When we consider the incredible advances in human and natural sciences and in technology since those days, we can barely comprehend what is happening to Palestinian civilians at the hands of the Israelis, similar as it is to the treatment received by the vanquished at the hands of the victors in those earlier conflicts. The basic difference is that today it is a case of occupied and occupier.

This Council has been called upon more than once since the current series of grave Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights began. The international community has given Israel more than one opportunity to change its policies of oppression, but to no avail. We must therefore redouble our efforts to halt this grave deterioration and its serious implications for international peace and security in the region. We call on the Security Council to assume its role and responsibility in the maintenance of international peace and security and to bring pressure to bear on Israel, the occupying Power, to end its aggressive practices against the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian people are in dire need of support and protection from Israeli brutality, which does not differentiate between children, young men, women and elderly people. In this regard, my delegation would like to express its support for the proposal to deploy an international protection force in the occupied territories, pursuant to the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel must cooperate with such a force.

The Palestinian question cannot be resolved if we do not pay sufficient attention to its root causes and their effects. We are not here simply to take note of Israeli violations of human rights, the suffocating blockade of Palestinian cities and other practices carried out by the Israeli occupying forces. We are here to deal with Israel's occupation of Palestine. The Security Council cannot stand idly by in the light of what is happening to Palestinian civilians and innocents.

Since the Security Council continues to hold special sessions aimed at protecting civilians and children in armed conflicts, and since it continues to send international observers to provide protection to such people, why then should it exclude the Palestinians from such international protection? What happens to the Palestinian people will be on the conscience of the international community — a conscience that is represented by the Council, which must assume its responsibilities and play its rightful role in the maintenance of international peace and security. Therefore a vote should be held on the proposal made to the Council to provide international protection to the Palestinians.

The President: I thank the representative of Bahrain for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Algeria. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Six months have elapsed since the Middle East was once again brutally thrust into the spotlight, struck by the endemic violence to which it seems doomed, following the unanimously condemned act of provocation by the man who ordered the Sabra and Shatila massacres, who led the disastrous campaign in Lebanon and who — irony of ironies — is now presiding over his country's fate.

That act of provocation, which triggered the tragedy that the Palestinian population is currently experiencing on a daily basis, clearly aimed to sabotage the peace process and to destroy, once and for all, any chance of a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question.

Today, it seems to everyone — most of all to the protagonists themselves — that the peace process is a thing of the past, and, given the changes that have taken place in Israel and the subsequent intensification of repressive measures against the population of the occupied territories, it appears unlikely to resume any time soon.

Indeed, not a day goes by without innocent young Palestinians being struck down — innocents who are armed only with their stubborn faith in an imminent victory against heavily armed soldiers who are determined to use force without any hesitation or restraint.

Every day, with untold brutality, this repression strikes a population that is already hard-hit and on the verge of suffocation, subjected as it is to summary executions; arbitrary arrests; the destruction of houses, roads and infrastructure; collective punishments; curfews; and the blockade of towns such as Ramallah, Tulkarem, Qalquilya, Bethlehem and Hebron.

The damage that has been caused by this all-out war waged by Israel against the Palestinian people is considerable. Hundreds are dead and thousands injured. The standard of living has dropped dramatically, since almost a million Palestinians — or a third of the population — have fallen below the threshold of absolute poverty since last September. Hundreds of schools have been closed because they can no longer operate, and there is a serious dearth of food and medication in many Palestinian towns, which are cut off from the rest of the world, and humanitarian assistance and basic emergency services can no longer reach them.

Furthermore, in flagrant violation of its obligations and in spite of the repeated appeals of the international community, Israel is continuing to withhold from the Palestinian Authority hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue that the Authority is owed.

In the light of this tragic situation, and given Israel's unrelenting attitude towards a defenceless population, the Palestinian Authority, backed by the Non-Aligned Movement, asked the Security Council several months ago to take steps to ensure the protection of that population and to put an end to the represssion to which it is subject.

In spite of the great flexibility shown by the representatives of Arab States and non-aligned countries during the negotiations on the draft resolution, the Security Council chose last December not to act but to let the situation on the ground deteriorate, possibly until the point of no return.

The peace negotiations that were then under way between Palestinians and Israelis, under the auspices of the United States — which certain members of the Council said that they did not want to jeopardize through an untimely intervention by the United Nations in the field, in order to justify their opposition to the deployment of unarmed observers — have since then failed utterly, as have, because of the intransigence of the Israeli authorities, all of the efforts aimed at restoring calm and security.

The Council has taken an unacceptably passive stance vis-à-vis a Member State that for decades has been occupying with total impunity the territory of neighbouring States; which holds under its control an entire people, who are denied their most basic rights; and which refuses to implement the resolutions of the very Organization that created it and to fulfil its international obligations. How then can we not talk about a double standard and not condemn this injustice?

At this particularly difficult juncture, which could worsen further because of the repression, the intimidation and the systematic use of force, which seems to be the new course of action for the current Israeli administration, there is still time for the Security Council to assume its responsibility and fully to discharge its role and mandate vis-à-vis the Palestinian people and in respect of international legality.

First, it must urgently put an end to the policy of repression and of the systematic use of force, and in particular the use of real bullets against Palestinian demonstrators. It must also decide to promptly deploy United Nations observers in the Palestinian territories and in Jerusalem in order to protect the civilian population. It must also demand that Israel withdraw its forces from Palestinian towns and localities where they are deployed and put an end to the blockade of these towns. Lastly, it must order Israel, as the administering Power, to respect the Fourth Geneva Convention and the ensure the security and protection of Palestinian civilians.

These are demands of Algeria, which, like other Arab countries, believes in a just and lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East based on the principle of land for peace agreed upon in Madrid. This means the total withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Arab territories occupied in 1967 and the reinstatement of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to the establishment of an independent State, with Al-Ouds Al-Sharif as its capital.

I am convinced that these are also the expectations of the international community as a whole, which the Council must take into account and satisfy as early as possible.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Japan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Akasaka (Japan): First, I want to welcome you back to New York, Mr. President. My delegation expresses its appreciation to you for providing us with this opportunity to discuss the grave situation we face today in the Middle East.

The current violence is already resulting in the tragic loss of more lives and material destruction, and we are concerned that the escalation of violence may bring about a disastrous result in the whole region. Moreover, the continued violence is damaging the political atmosphere for peace, which is a prerequisite for resuming substantive talks. We therefore urge all the parties concerned to make determined efforts to put an end to the current violence. We also call on all parties to refrain from any action that could further complicate the situation. Most importantly, they must observe the "blue line" identified by the United Nations last May.

As we all know, a negotiated peace is the only realistic option. We therefore urge the parties concerned yet anew to make every effort to resume their negotiations, especially the final status negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians.

In this context, we are encouraged by the fact that in its basic policy guideline, the new Israeli Government explicitly expressed its determination to pursue final peace agreements with the Palestinians and Syria, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and a peace treaty with Lebanon. It is also encouraging that Foreign Minister Shimon Peres came to discuss the issues with the Council yesterday.

Yet we have to point out that too strict a linkage between the cessation of violence and the resumption of negotiation could play into the hands of those elements who do not wish to seek a peaceful settlement and the coexistence of the State of Israel with an independent Palestinian State.

We believe that in the light of the heightened enmities, to resume dialogue is an essential first step in rebuilding confidence among the parties concerned. We therefore call on them to make every effort to do so as soon as possible.

The serious deterioration of the Palestinian economy is also a matter of grave concern to us. The livelihoods of the Palestinian people and the financial basis of the Palestinian Authority are being undermined. This will, no doubt, have a profoundly negative effect on the peace process. We therefore urge the Israeli Government to do its utmost to enable the Palestinians to resume their normal economic activities.

It is also critically important that the international community help alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians. Japan, for its part, has extended contributions to the Palestinians amounting to $12 million since the outbreak of the clashes.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Council that Japan will remain determined to make every possible effort to help achieve the cessation of violence and the resumption of the peace process.

The President: I thank the representative of Japan for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker on my list is the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Babaa (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to congratulate you at the outset, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. We also wish to extend a word of congratulations to you on the assumption of a new post in your country and to wish you every success. We are confident that, thanks to your wisdom and skill, the Council deliberations this month will be successful. I also wish to express our deep appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Tunisia, my brother Mr. Said Ben Mustapha, for his impressive stewardship of the Council during the past month.

The question of Palestine, its causes and outcome, are well known to the Council members and to the world. There is no need to recall that the Jewish problem was a European problem throughout history. It was never an Arab or an Islamic problem. The manner in which that problem was brought to the Arab region, to be disposed of, resulted in the dislocation of the Palestinian people from their homeland.

There is no need to recall the United Nations resolutions that still need to be implemented and that the Palestinian problem cannot be resolved without the return of the Palestinian people to their homeland and the establishment of their independent and sovereign State on their national territory. The Palestinian people have faced oppression and displacement for more than eight decades, and it continues to endure the brutality of occupation. Now, they face the tanks of the occupying Power and its missiles and airplanes.

We know very little about what happens in the Palestinian territories, because the army of occupation tries to impede coverage of events there. The Committee for the Protection of American Journalists has addressed a letter to the occupying Power, expressing its concern about the safety of media representatives in the occupied territories. It expressed in a letter published by *The New York Times* its deep concern about the brutality committed by the Israeli army against journalists, including those from Reuters and *Agence France Presse*.

In fact, some Israeli newspapers have started to talk about collective punishment and the tragedies endured by the Palestinians. Yesterday, *Ha'aretz*, the Israeli newspaper, published an article carrying the condemnation of the International Committee of the Red Cross of the collective punishment by the army of occupation of the Palestinian population. The newspaper said that the Israeli practices have become untenable and constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. It also said that the killings that take place every day do not occur as a result of confrontations between Palestinian demonstrators and the army of occupation, but that Palestinians are killed every day either in their beds, on the doorsteps of their homes or on their way to their house, work or farm.

Every day we see reports of killings in cold blood by Zionist snipers. These practices are similar to the Nazi practices. They take the form of confiscation of Palestinian lands, house demolitions, the uprooting of trees and restriction of the movement of Palestinians living near settlements.

I would also like to cite something from yesterday's edition of the Israeli newspaper, *Yediot Aharonot*:

> "For some five months now, in the territories" — that is, the occupied Palestinian territories — "there has been a slow but systematic and calculated process of annihilation of the Palestinian people. Soldiers have been trained meticulously to target human beings, and they cannot discriminate between a demonstrator and a passer-by. At least 12,000 Palestinian civilians have been injured, become blind or incapacitated, and many have suffered the amputation of their arms."

If the Zionist occupation forces claim to defend themselves, then why do they refuse to receive international inquiry commissions, and why do they not cooperate with such commissions? The Palestinians are expected to accept the peace of slaves and to live in less than 15 per cent of their historical homeland. They are confined to their homes, as is happening in Hebron.

The Council should not expect any response from the Zionist occupation army, because the leaders of Tel Aviv are, for the majority, war criminals. This is a well-known fact. Indeed, there are calls within Israel itself to put General Mofaz, the Israeli Army Chief of Staff, on trial as a war criminal, because he leads daily criminal practices as his forces carry out assassinations of Palestinians and destroy thousands of acres of farmland in the Palestinian territories.

The hands of General Sharon are bloodstained with the blood of Arabs and Palestinians, and he is proud of that. Now he is in a powerful position at the head of the Tel Aviv regime, resuming his mandate of imposing faits accompli and scorched-earth policies. Dr. James Strong, professor of sociology and political science at Johns Hopkins University, published an article in the *Chicago Tribune* last month in which he described Sharon as a war criminal. He cited many criminal acts and massacres that prove beyond any doubt that Sharon is a war criminal. The author also referred to the desecration by Sharon of the Dome of the Rock Mosque in occupied Jerusalem.

What is paradoxical is that at the time the international community practices double standards, the world remained silent when the butcher Sharon was elected as chief of the bloody military institution in Tel Aviv. But in the case of the election of a right-wing politician in a European country where democracy prevailed, there was an international outcry in the United States against it.

The sight of boys and young men who bravely face one of the mightiest military machines in the world, one supported by many countries throughout the world, affirms one thing: the Palestinian people insist on pursuing their resistance to an alien, settler, colonialist system that is unique in history. The Palestinians confirm that the usurpers and invaders will not enjoy their lives because of their usurpation.

As it is debating the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, the Council should not forget that the Palestinian people have lived under the longest term of military occupation in modern history, except for the Japanese occupation of Korea, and the Council should not forget its resolutions in order to redress the injustices sustained by the Palestinians. It must not forget how the Zionists continue to violate the Geneva Conventions, and it must remember the massacres committed in Deir Yassin, Sabra and Shatila and the massacres that are taking place in broad daylight.

In conclusion, we call upon the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility towards maintaining international peace and security along the following lines. First, the Council must take the proper measures to provide full protection for the Palestinian people under international law and the Geneva Conventions. Secondly, the Council must agree to form an observer force under the aegis of the United Nations and deploy that force in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, in order to provide adequate protection. Thirdly, there must be condemnation of the Nazi-like practices committed by the Zionist occupation forces in the form of blockades, starvation, land confiscation, destruction of farmland and cold-blooded assassination through the use of internationally prohibited armaments.

Failure by the Council to take a decision now, under the pretext that it should provide the butcher Sharon an opportunity for discussion with the Secretary-General or delay in taking the proper decision, would mean that the Council is sending a message of encouragement to the occupation forces to continue their Nazi-like practices against Palestinians and is encouraging them to pursue their policies of occupation, annexation and confiscation of land and blockade and perpetration of suffering.

The President: I thank the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Qatar, whom I invite to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Al-Khal (Qatar) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Mr. President, despite the very tragic conditions under which this meeting is being held, I would like to begin my statement by offering my congratulations to you for presiding over the work of the Council this month. I am fully confident that your wisdom and experience will crown the work of the Council with the desired success. My delegation would like to express its appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Said Ben Mustapha, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Tunisia to the United Nations, on the effectiveness and efficiency with which he managed the Council's work during his presidency. I would also like to extend my thanks to you for holding this meeting at the request of the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations as Chairman of the Arab Group this month.

We have come once again to your Council, Mr. President, to review the serious developments that are occurring in the occupied Arab lands and that to date have resulted in the killing of more than 350 innocent civilians, including women and children. Many thousands of others have been wounded because they are demanding the right to live in dignity.

Over the last few months the Council has hesitated to take decisive action concerning these developments in the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, despite the many interventions by peace-loving States, the last of which was a visit by the ministerial delegation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference led by the Qatari Minister for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani. That visit set a precedent that some considered to be an embodiment of the seriousness with which the situation in the region is being dealt with. All this hesitation and pussy-footing had an adverse impact and led to an escalation of the events and to an increase in the number of those killed and injured, and to an increase in unemployment on the Palestinian side due to the policies of isolation and siege and deliberate killing exercised by the occupying Israeli authorities.

The State of Qatar calls upon the Member States in the Security Council that abstained on the draft resolution submitted by the States members of the non-aligned group in the Security Council to review their previous positions.

The Israeli Government has shown its true face since the Israeli forces, beginning 11 March 2001, have implemented a serious aggressive plan against the Palestinian people that includes taking provocative measures on the ground, namely the dismantling of the West Bank into 43 parts and dividing the Gaza Strip into four parts or cantons. This has been accomplished through the deployment of military forces and tanks, digging trenches and setting up dirt barriers around population centres in Palestinian cities and villages in order to restrict the movement of citizens and thus to entrench the suffocating economic siege. All this is being done to subjugate the Palestinian people and to prevent them from earning a livelihood. This step on the part of the Israelis is a complementary measure to what they took in other areas with the aim of isolating the Palestinians within the occupied Arab territories from the outside world, as well as destroying the Palestinian economy. The policy of siege and suffocation and setting strict restrictions on the movement of people and goods has not only effected the Palestinian economy as a whole but has also individual Palestinian families, since students cannot get to their schools and labourers cannot get to their places of work. One can imagine the reaction when children are without schools and heads of families without work.

The tragic situation in the Palestinian territory at the moment forces the Security Council — in accordance with its mandate and responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security under Articles 24 and 37 of the Charter, and taking into account the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of civilians in occupied territories — to assume its responsibilities. First, it needs to provide adequate protection for the Palestinian people, which is exposed to the most brutal forms of repression and aggression as practised by the Israeli occupying forces, until it can exercise its full rights in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy without the pretext of compliance by the two parties to set up such a force, since Palestine is under the power of the occupying authority. It is not just that the Palestinians be informed that the United Nations cannot provide protection for them because those who are occupying their territory do not accept the provision of such protection. Secondly, the Council must put the necessary pressure on the present Israeli Government to force it to comply with the agreements that have been reached in the previous stages of the peace process, as well as to respect what has been achieved in the previous negotiations and to resume those negotiations where they had stopped.

The State of Qatar believes that a comprehensive and permanent peace in the Israeli-Arab conflict will not be achieved unless Israel complies with all the Security Council resolutions, particularly 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the principle of land for peace, thus enabling the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate rights. Foremost among these rights are the rights to return, self-determination and to establish their independent State on their national soil with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital, complete Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 as well as complete Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory to the internationally recognized borders, including the Shab'aa Farms, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978), and releasing all prisoners of war in Israeli prisons.

In conclusion, it must be understood that the Palestinians are not the cause of the security problems that Israel is facing. Israeli insistence on occupying Palestinian territory and its continuous aggression against the Palestinian people is the real cause of these problems. Eliminating Israeli security problems will not be achieved unless we put an end to the occupation and dismantle the settlements. Priority should be given to putting an end to the repression of the Palestinians, and measures for confidence-building should form the foundation that will enable the peoples of the area to live in permanent peace and security. The bloodletting that we witness daily must lead to a just settlement through negotiation based on the principle of land for peace, on international legitimacy and on the resolutions of the Security Council, and not on the use of force.

The President: I thank the representative of Qatar for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative Sweden. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Schori (Sweden): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey align themselves with this statement.

The prospect of peace must return to the Middle East. There is no alternative to a political solution. The European Union reiterates today its deep concern at the chain of violent events during the last months and holds that it is the responsibility of the Israeli as well as the Palestinian authorities to do their utmost to prevent actions resulting in new victims. We call on both parties to act with maximum restraint and to do their utmost to prevent terrorist acts and the growth of sentiments of revenge.

New talks on security must get underway. The European Union appeals to the Government of Israel and to the Palestinian Authority to re-engage immediately in security cooperation in order to reverse the spiral of violence.

The humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories is of great concern. The current economic crisis is unacceptable and threatens the stability of the region and the prospects for peace. Both parties have a duty to minimize tensions between them. Improving the economic situation in the occupied territories is an important element in that effort. On 26 February the European Union decided to make the funds in its existing Cash Facility — €60 million — available as grants to the Palestinian Authority. The funds will be disbursed in the context of a concerted international effort and on the condition that the Palestinian Authority draw up a revised budget as a basis for international support and take more effective measures against corruption and towards more transparency. The European Union urges other donors to increase their contributions to help meet the severe challenges facing the Palestinian economy.

In view of its devastating effects on the Palestinian economy, and therefore on political stability, the European Union stresses the importance of immediately ending the withholding of revenue payments due to the Palestinian Authority. Israel should transfer at once those tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority. The European Union also reiterates the importance of ending the blockades in the Palestinian areas so that the acute economic and humanitarian crises can be brought to an end. Israel must allow and facilitate access for humanitarian personnel and goods to Palestinian territories.

The European Union notes the recent easing of the closures on Hebron, Bethlehem, Tulkarem and Qualquilya, and believes that more needs to be done to lift the closures in the Palestinian territories. During a recent visit to the region, a European Union delegation led by the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ms. Anna Lindh, expressed to Prime Minister Sharon and Minister for Foreign Affairs Peres, as well as to President Arafat, the European Union's willingness to help move the peace process forward. It was underlined that no opportunity for a peaceful settlement should be missed, despite the present crisis in the region. The European Union also raised the issue of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories, and of possible assistance by the international community. In addition, the issues of closures and transfers of tax revenues were raised by the European Union.

Prime Minister Sharon expressed understanding for the European Union's concerns over the various practices of collective punishment. The European Union reads this as a promising first step.

On the Israeli-Palestinian track, the European Union understands that much ground has been covered in open and frank negotiations. The European Union is convinced that the progress made on all major issues during the last negotiations should form the basis for future talks on permanent status. The Union also looks forward to a prompt resumption of the negotiations between Israel, on the one hand, and Syria and Lebanon, on the other.

The European Union reaffirms its view that the basis for negotiations and for a just and lasting pace must be Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions. It must also include the principle of the inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by war, the need for every State in the area to be able to live in security, and the principle of land for peace. The European Union calls upon the parties to reaffirm their commitments to the basic principles established within the framework of Madrid, Oslo and subsequent agreements, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The European Union deplores all acts of violence. In this context, the European Union reiterates its strongly held opinion that Israel's policy on extrajudicial killings is unacceptable and contrary to the rule of law, and it urges Israel to cease this practice and thus respect international law. Extrajudicial killings are an obstacle to peace and could provoke further violence.

The European Union recalls its recent declaration in response to the two executions carried out by the Palestinian Authority on 13 January, encouraging President Arafat to consider a moratorium on the death penalty and reiterating its view that the abolition of the death penalty worldwide would contribute to the enhancement of human dignity.

For months we have seen Palestinian and Israeli casualties. The situation is intolerable, and both parties must shoulder their responsibilities and bring the senseless violence and human suffering to a halt, and thus open up perspectives and give hope to Palestinians and Israelis for a better life in dignity and security. The lack of progress in the peace process, including on the settlements issue, lies at the heart of the Palestinian population's frustration.

The international community, including the United Nations and its Secretary-General, can play an important role in assisting the parties. The European Union supports the idea that, as requested by Security Council members in November of last year, the Secretary-General should explore with the parties arrangements for an observer mission.

The European Union reiterates its willingness to contribute to advancing the Middle East peace process.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of the Sudan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Erwa (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my sincere congratulations to you and to your friendly country, Sir, on Ukraine's assumption of the presidency of the Council for the current month. I would also like to extend my congratulations to your predecessor, Ambassador Saïd Ben Mustapha, Permanent Representative of Tunisia, and to the members of his delegation for their superb stewardship of the Council last month. I would also like to pay tribute to the new members of the Council.

In beginning my remarks, I would like to associate the Sudan's position of support with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Many months after the last open meeting of the Security Council on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, which took place last year, the situation in occupied Palestine continues to worsen. This is due to the fact that the occupying Power continues to employ excessive use of military force against innocent, unarmed Palestinians. The occupying Power also continues to carry out its criminal plan to tighten the blockade against Palestinian towns and villages so as to strangle the Palestinian economy and to subjugate and starve the Palestinian people. All those efforts are first and foremost meant to isolate the Palestinian people within the occupied territories and to cut them off from the outside world, to destroy the Palestinian economy and to undermine the infrastructures of Palestine. This is in addition to the declared measures aimed at changing the demographic and geographic composition of the Palestinian territories through the building of settlements, and through measures taken in the Holy City of Jerusalem with a view to creating new realities on the ground that will be difficult to reverse in the future.

The primary responsibility for the rising death toll among the innocent civilian Palestinian population in occupied Palestine falls squarely on the Security Council, which last December failed to adopt a draft resolution calling for protecting the Palestinian people — and especially women and children — from the daily acts of aggression committed by the Israeli occupation forces. The Council put forward untenable justifications that cast doubt on its credibility before world public opinion and that in fact confirmed the Council's practice of double standards and its lack of even-handedness. The Council gave the entire world the impression that Israel was exempt from the provisions and rules governing international peace and security that, under the Charter of the United Nations, are supposed to be upheld by the Security Council.

The daily criminal acts of aggression committed by Israel against the Palestinian people, in addition to its violations of resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council and of international humanitarian law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, put this Council to a real and major test. We therefore expect the Council to rise to its level of responsibility by reconsidering its previous position and moving forward in order to adopt effective measures that would ensure an end to violence and to the use of random force by the Israeli occupation authorities against innocent Palestinian civilians and to mandate the composition of an international force to protect them.

Any failure by the Council to establish a protection force to protect the Palestinians against daily repressive measures by the occupying Power and to monitor the situation in occupied Palestine would be tantamount to backtracking by the Council from its obligations as set forth in the Charter and would also be tantamount to a protection of the aggressor and an encouragement to that aggressor to further pursue the daily acts of killing and torture against the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, we would like to reaffirm what we have said before this Council on previous occasions — that the long-sought peace in the Middle East will not be achieved as long as Israel persists in its expansionist policies, its acts of oppression and aggression and its efforts to Judaize Jerusalem. The only viable way to bring about peace throughout the Middle East is to end the Israeli occupation through a real commitment by Israel to the land-for-peace formula. Israel must fully comply with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which constitute the foundation of the peace process in the Middle East. For its part, Israel has indeed moved backwards in this process by disavowing its commitments and promises, in the belief that it can achieve its full security at the expense of the security of other parties.

The President: I thank the representative of the Sudan for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of South Africa. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Nacerodien (South Africa): I would like to congratulate Ukraine on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March 2001. On behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the President for convening this important discussion in the Council. It is essential that we as the United Nations take action to address the pressing situation in Palestine.

Just last month, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Terje Roed Larsen, issued a report on the impact of the repressive measures on the Palestinian people. According to Mr. Roed Larsen, the Palestinian economy has suffered gross domestic product losses of over $900 million since the onset of the crisis and labour income losses of over $240 million. Based on World Bank data, the report estimates that 32 per cent of the population is now living in poverty — a 50 per cent increase since the onset of the crisis.

Closures, blockades and restrictions on the movement of goods, persons and resources imposed by Israel have resulted in the economic suffocation of the Palestinian people. By any standards these figures clearly show the devastating impact that the closures have on the Palestinian economy, fuelling and fomenting dangerously high levels of frustration and violence.

The international community, much less the Security Council, cannot remain silent whilst a militarily superior occupying force violates international humanitarian law. How many more innocent lives must be lost before we take action?

The Non-Aligned Movement repeats the call on the Security Council to pass a resolution mandating the immediate deployment of a force to protect Palestinian civilians against the impact of the military campaign of the Israeli armed forces. The United Nations, and in particular the Security Council as the custodian of international peace and security, must adopt measures to bring an immediate end to the suffering of the Palestinian people.

The recent closure of Palestinian towns by the Israeli Defence Force, in particular the ongoing blockade of Ramallah, has further undermined the already precarious humanitarian situation in the occupied territories. Palestinian civilians are not only being prevented from reaching their places of work in Israel, but they are also being denied access to essential food and medicine supplies.

Such a heavy-handed and disproportionate response by Israel constitutes an affront to the most basic rights of the Palestinian people. These actions contravene Security Council resolution 1322 (2000), which calls upon Israel to meticulously abide by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. As members of this Council well know, the Fourth Geneva Convention expressly prohibits the collective punishment of a civilian population. The Non-Aligned Movement therefore reiterates its call on Israel to act with restraint and to meticulously abide by its legal obligations with respect to the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

The Conference of High Contracting Parties of the Fourth Geneva Convention held in Geneva in July 1999 stated its readiness to reconvene should the need arise. The High Contracting Parties had, in common article 1, agreed to "undertake to respect and ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances". Clearly the time has come for the High Contracting Parties to meet urgently on the situation in Palestine.

The Non-Aligned Movement has long affirmed that the question of Palestine constitutes the nucleus of the Middle East conflict. The achievement of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital is pivotal to the achievement of a sustained and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The Movement believes that peaceful negotiation is the only means of ensuring lasting peace, security and stability in the region. We urge the parties to take the required steps to ensure the cessation of hostilities, to restore calm and to adopt measures to re-establish mutual trust. It is only then that an atmosphere conducive to the resumption of negotiations can be created.

We firmly believe that the condition of land for peace is essential if meaningful progress in the peace process is to be attained. For a durable, just and comprehensive peace, negotiation towards final status issues has to be in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy.

Once more the Non-Aligned Movement wishes to repeat our firm belief that it remains the permanent responsibility of the United Nations to stay fully engaged in the Palestinian question until a definitive solution is achieved.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Kuwait. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to extend to you, Sir, our thanks and appreciation for your positive response to the request of the Arab Group to convene this meeting to discuss the deteriorating situation of our Palestinian brothers in the occupied Palestinian territories. I wish also to extend to you and to the Government of Ukraine our special congratulations on your presidency of this Council. We are confident that you will guide the work of the Council in an able manner.

I wish also to register our appreciation for the outstanding efforts of your predecessor, my brother from Tunisia, in managing the affairs of the Council last month in a manner that reflected his great and renowned experience in the international arena.

Our participation today in the discussion of the illegal Israeli practices against the Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, affirms the dangers and consequences of the provocative behaviour of Ariel Sharon, the Prime Minister of Israel, on 28 September, when he paid a notorious provocative visit to Al-Haram Al-Sharif. That visit laid a heavy political burden on Israel, but is by no means heavier than the bitterness and pain of the brotherly Palestinians. It was an arrogant act that revealed hatred for all elements of the peace and stability to which we in the Arab States aspire.

Kuwait strongly deplores Israeli practices against Palestinian civilians and the methods of repression deliberately employed by occupying soldiers against defenceless innocent people fighting for their freedom from the occupation authorities. Our concern is increased by the fact that the Israeli Government is using all forms of repression and violence against Palestinian civilians, approximately 400 of whom have been killed to date. Following these deliberate killings, including of defenceless children, since 7 March Israel has imposed a policy of blockade on the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. This has further aggravated the living conditions of Palestinian people in every walk of life to a level that is unacceptable to any human being.

All this undoubtedly represents a violation of United Nations resolutions and the principles of international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva

Convention of 1949 and the obligations emanating therefrom under the two Protocols Additional of 1977. In this context, we call for a consideration of ways to guarantee the full implementation of that Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem.

The suffering of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories requires the firm resolve of the international community to give no credence to the allegations of the Israeli Government that it is acting to alleviate the consequences of the blockade on the Palestinian people. The Security Council is fully responsible for ensuring the security and safety of the Palestinian civilians and for safeguarding their dignity and right to live free from the repression of the occupying Power. Thus, we extend our absolute support for the Palestinian request that a United Nations force be established to protect Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. We trust that the establishment of such a force will reveal the truth and will curb the brutal Israeli practices perpetrated daily against the Palestinian civilians.

In Kuwait, we do not understand why the Israeli Government is afraid of the establishment of a protection force, especially since Israel claims that it is not responsible for the violence occurring there. If it is sincere, it is illogical that it should oppose the establishment of such a force. We also believe that the creation of a force to guarantee the protection of the Palestinians would contribute to stability and restore the situation as it was in the past. Moreover, the report of the fact-finding mission established under a resolution of the Commission on Human Rights stresses the need to establish an international mechanism to protect Palestinian civilians.

In Kuwait, we support all peaceful initiatives designed to find a just solution to the Palestinian question in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy, particularly Security Council resolution 242 (1967). We maintain our firm stance in solidarity with the just requests and claims of the Palestinians for their legitimate political rights and to establish their independent State on their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital. We wish to emphasize that, if peace is to be just and comprehensive, it should be based on international resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the principle of land for peace. This should lead to Israel's withdrawal from all the Arab territories it occupied in 1967, including the Syrian Golan, and to its complete withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

The President: I thank the representative of Kuwait for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Iraq. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Al-Douri (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Mr. President, allow me to extend to you my congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month and to wish you every success. I should like, through you, to thank the Ambassador of Tunisia, Saïd Ben Mustapha, for a job well done as President of the Council last month, and also to extend my thanks to you for your quick response to the request to consider this important and serious issue, which deals with the very essence of the work of the Council — the maintenance of international peace and security.

My delegation, despite the fact that we are very doubtful as to the possibility of finding a just solution to this very serious problem, hopes that today's discussions of the issue will lead to an end to the continuous and unjust aggression to which the unarmed brotherly Arab Palestinian people are facing on their land and in their homes.

We have previously dealt with this issue — not so long ago. The Council held formal and informal consultations, but, regrettably, we did not reach any results. This is because of the insistence of one country — the United States of America — on maintaining the status quo, under many flimsy pretexts and excuses.

That State provides the occupying Zionist entity with the means of force that enable it to exercise daily its aggressive policies against the Palestinian people. It also continues to direct threats against many other Arab countries.

The failure of the Council to deter the aggressor was, and still is, one of the principal reasons for the continuation of the Palestinian bloodshed and the increase in the number of martyrs, among them Palestinian youths and children. All of this takes place in full view of the international community, which seems incapable of taking any measures to halt this aggression and to put an end to the occupation.

Is it not strange that a notorious terrorist with a long history of bloodshed, who is directly responsible for shedding Palestinian blood, should preside over the Zionist entity? Indeed, this has led to the unmasking of the ugly face of Zionism. This person, who carried out the Sabra and Shatila massacres, is the same person who desecrated the Temple Mount on 28 September, leading to the wave of violence against the Palestinians, which has not yet stopped.

This terrorist started his work, as an official in the Zionist entity, by escalating the aggression through the taking of measures to dissect the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. He has exercised his hobbies in a most arrogant manner: political assassinations, the imposition of sieges and the blocking of access to food and medicine by Palestinian villages and cities, thus violating the principles of the Geneva Conventions and of international humanitarian law.

This outrageous situation and these irresponsible, criminal measures make it imperative for the Security Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter and to take decisive measures aimed at halting this unceasing aggression against the unarmed Palestinian people, who have nothing but stones.

My delegation has clarified its position with respect to this issue on more than one occasion. In the Security Council meeting held on 4 October 2000, we clearly pointed out that the question is not how to force the Palestinians into an unbalanced round of negotiations with the occupying Power, because the negotiations will definitely not restore their rights.

But one must consider the essence of the problem in order to find the appropriate solutions. The problem began when a British citizen by the name of Balfour promised, in 1917, another British citizen, by the name of Rothschild, that he would set up a national homeland for him and for other extremists in Palestine. Thus the prince gave to others what he did not own.

The question essentially concerns the military occupation of Palestinian land by a flood of adventurers from Europe and other parts of the world, under the pretext that it was an unpopulated land. At issue are the continuous and repetitive acts of aggression carried out by this usurping entity against the Arab States and its occupation of the Palestinian territory since 1948, in addition to its occupation of the Syrian Golan and Lebanese territory.

In summary, we are dealing with the tragedy of a people under occupation, subjected to the worst forms of repression, brutality and displacement. The question is the suffering of more than 4 million Palestinian refugees, who were forced to leave their land, in contravention of the principles of international law, which guarantee their full right to return to their homeland.

The Zionist, racist creed, which is expansionist, arrogant and hateful, is the reason behind all the tragedies that have befallen the Palestinian people, including the desecration of holy sites that more than a billion Muslims, and Christians as well, hold sacred.

In short, this is the essence of the Palestinian question, and these are its principal components. So if we want a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, we should consider all these elements, because together they represent the essence of the tragedy of the Palestinian people. If we fail to do so, the Zionist aggression will continue, and the Security Council will continue to be incapable of assuming its responsibilities vis-à-vis this serious situation, which threatens, and will continue to threaten, international peace and security.

The President: I thank the representative of Iraq for the kind words he addressed to me.

There are a number of speakers remaining on my list. In view of the lateness of the hour, and with the concurrence of the members of the Council, I intend to suspend the meeting now. The meeting is suspended until early next week. The time will be announced in the *Journal*.

The meeting was suspended at 7 p.m.

United Nations

S/PV.4295 (Resumption 1)*

Security Council

Fifty-sixth year

Provisional

4295th meeting

Thursday, 15 March 2001, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Yel'chenko	(Ukraine)
Members:	Bangladesh	Mr. Ahsan
	China	Mr. Wang Yingfan
	Colombia	Mr. Valdivieso
	France	Mr. Levitte
	Ireland	Mr. Ryan
	Jamaica	Miss Durrant
	Mali	Mr. Issouf Oumar Maiga
	Mauritius	Mr. Neewoor
	Norway	Mr. Kolby
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Singapore	Mr. Mahbubani
	Tunisia	Mr. Ben Mustapha
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Jeremy Greenstock
	United States of America	Mr. Cunningham

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Letter dated 13 March 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2001/216).

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* Reissued for technical reasons.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178.

The meeting was resumed at 3.15 p.m.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Cuba, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the discussion without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Dausá Céspedes (Cuba) took a seat at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: Members of the Council have received photocopies of a letter dated 14 March 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2001/231.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation attaches great importance to continued discussion in the Security Council of the question of the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The statements made on 14 March at the meetings of the Security Council by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, Mr. Shimon Peres, and by the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, Ambassador Al-Kidwa, provided an opportunity for the members of the Security Council to hear about the approaches of the Israelis and of the Palestinians to ways of overcoming violence on the West Bank and in Gaza and to the search for a way out of the deadlock in the peace dialogue.

The Russian Federation has been following with great concern the situation of tension that has prevailed for more than half a year now in the Palestinian territories, as well as the continued acts of violence that have led to the deaths of several hundred people, mostly Palestinians. Since the very beginning of the crisis, the leadership of Russia has been undertaking maximum efforts towards a settlement of the situation and a resumption of the peaceful dialogue between the parties. To this end, the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Igor Ivanov, have remained in constant contact with the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships and with the leaders of other interested States, as well as the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Unfortunately, the tensions are not easing. The situation is being exacerbated by the actions of the Israeli side, aimed at the isolation of the West Bank and Gaza, with the use of heavy military equipment. There is a virtual economic blockade of the territory of the Palestinian National Authority. We take note of the clarifications that were made in the statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, Shimon Peres, at yesterday's Security Council meeting, and which were also reiterated today by the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations. We are convinced, however, that the economic blockade must be immediately lifted.

It should be clear also that no terrorist acts — and Russia condemns all such acts — can serve as a justification for such harsh measures as those that are now being taken against the Palestinians. On the contrary, we are convinced that such steps can only play into the hands of those who want the violence to continue and who are against a resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating process.

We believe that at this stage, a priority task must be the speedy overcoming of violence in the West Bank and in Gaza. On that basis, we call upon the Palestinians and the Israelis to demonstrate maximum restraint and prudence in order to avoid any further escalation of the conflict.

We are convinced that, now as never before, compromise is important, and that both sides must meet each other halfway, demonstrate flexibility and realism and ensure the continuity of the peace process, on the basis, first and foremost, of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and of the Madrid principles. To this end, there must be a speedy establishment of direct Palestinian-Israeli contacts, inter alia, at a high level. Only in that way will it be possible to eliminate the obstacles to a normalization of the situation and to the resumption of the peaceful negotiations.

In that context, we note the exchange of messages that took place between the leader of the Palestinian National Authority, Yasser Arafat, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon. We note also that that exchange was carried out in a rather constructive spirit. The most important thing is that both leaders have reaffirmed their aspiration to achieve peace. In

Moscow, hope is being expressed that these positive signals will be further developed in the very near future.

For its part, the Russian Federation is continuing to make every effort to promote the elaboration of a strategy to resolve the current crisis that would be acceptable to the parties directly involved in the conflict and that would promote a speedy settlement of the situation in the region. It is precisely those approaches that will be guiding us in the Security Council in the consideration of the question of a possible international presence in the occupied Palestinian territories. We are counting on the fact that the Security Council will be able to achieve consensus on this question.

Mr. Levitte (France) (*spoke in French*): The Ambassador of Sweden will express the position of all of the countries of the European Union in his statement, which France wholeheartedly supports. However, France would like to stress several points.

France wishes first of all to express its very deep consternation at the tragedy that has been unfolding over the past six months in the Palestinian territories and in Israel. More than 400 people have died, most of them Palestinians, including dozens of children. Here we would like to express our deepest regrets and extend our condolences to the families of all the victims.

The situation is serious. The parties appear to have less and less control over the events. There is continuing insecurity in the Palestinian territories and in Israel, despair on the part of a people with no prospects, and a disastrous economic situation. Negotiations between the parties have been broken off since the Tabah meeting, and a climate of deep-seated suspicion and even hatred prevails. The gains of the Oslo process are in jeopardy.

It is crucial that calm be restored. France and the European Union have on several occasions condemned violence in all its forms: the use of excessive force by the Israeli army against Palestinian civilians and the unacceptable summary executions, but also the acts of terrorism that have caused grief among the Israeli people.

France and the European Union have also registered their deep concern at the measures taken by Israeli Government, including the blockading of territories and the refusal to hand over to the Palestinian Authority the taxes that have been assessed on its behalf — these are among the many collective reprisals that can only exacerbate tensions and the resentment of an entire people. Generally speaking, Israel must respect human rights and international humanitarian law, namely the Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies to all of the occupied Palestinian territories.

The easing of travel restrictions imposed by the Israeli Government, if indeed it takes place, is a move in the right direction. The strategy followed in recent weeks could only fuel frustrations and worsen the already catastrophic economic situation. The European Union and its members — the largest provider of assistance to the Palestinian people — have taken special measures to assist the population and the Palestinian Authority. The entire international community must take part in this spirit of solidarity.

These violent confrontations are all the more troublesome considering that the two parties had never been so close to peace, both at Camp David and at Tabah. Openness on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides had made it possible to obtain, for the very first time, a glimpse of an agreement, even on the most sensitive aspects — Jerusalem, refugees and the territories.

Hopes for peace and for harmonious coexistence, focused on cooperation and the future, must live on. We continue to believe that the negotiations of the last few months have paved the way for us to follow. The solutions that have been explored will one day form the basis of the long-awaited final settlement. Such a settlement must be based on Israel's right to live in peace within recognized borders and on the right of the Palestinian people to have a state, a territory and a capital. It is based on resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), on the principle of land for peace, and on the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference.

Weapons must be silenced, and dialogue must resume. We solemnly call upon the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to do all within their power to halt the spiral of violence. The current situation, in which each is waiting for the other to make the first move, can only lead to an impasse. Firm acts are necessary to restore real trust. Respect for the agreements signed since Oslo and a real freeze on settlements will greatly contribute to this.

The Palestinian issue cannot be separated from a just and comprehensive settlement of the conflict between Israel and the Arab countries. We call for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon on the basis of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

How can we help negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority? We have to think about how to restore a minimum of trust between the parties. The impetus provided by the United States remains essential. The European Union, Russia, Egypt, Jordan and the United Nations can also contribute to this, as they showed at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit. In particular the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who has close contacts with all the parties involved in the Middle East crisis, can play a useful role. We fully support his action.

However, the Security Council also has a part to play. The current situation is a threat to peace in the region and therefore comes under its jurisdiction. It has already addressed the historical background and the origins of the crisis by adopting resolution 1322 (2000). It is now up to the Security Council, with Israel and the Palestinian Authority, to think about proposals that would facilitate contacts between the parties and would guarantee the desired results.

Sending observers to the field could be a useful mechanism in this regard, to ease tensions and to monitor compliance with commitments undertaken by the parties. That is why France, along with other countries, particularly the United Kingdom, initiated this idea last November. This mechanism will be helpful if it is accepted and agreed upon by the parties, and if it enjoys their full cooperation. The work of the observers would be an extension of the work begun by the Mitchell commission. The mechanism will be useful only if it is a part of a larger picture: the reduction of violence, compliance with commitments undertaken at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit and the resumption of negotiations.

It is in this spirit that we are considering any action that might be taken by the Council. But the Council will be heard by the parties only if it is united. We should not judge the past. Rather, we should define a positive approach and facilitate the search for a solution to this tragedy, working together with Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Wang Yingfan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Yesterday the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Shimon Peres, and the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, Ambassador Al-Kidwa, separately briefed the Council on the latest developments in the Palestinian-Israeli situation and presented their respective views. Today, at the request of some of the Council members, the President organized this open debate. This has positive significance for the United Nations efforts to promote the peace process in the Middle East.

At present, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues. It has not only aggravated the suffering of civilians and deepened hatred and hostility on both sides, it has also brought grave consequences for the peace process and regional security in the Middle East. If this situation is allowed to continue, the Palestinian and Israeli efforts, as well as the efforts made by the international community, which have yielded good results, might come to nothing.

The Council has been following the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the peace process in the Middle East. In order to restore and maintain peace and security in the Middle East, the Council has made many positive efforts. The proposal to send an observer mission to the ground has received wide support. The proposed observer mission is intended to ease and pacify the ongoing violence, which is in the interest of both parties. It must be pointed out that the understanding, cooperation and support of the Israeli side will be essential for the smooth deployment of the observer mission and its subsequent successful implementation of its mandate.

We continue to hope that the Israeli side will consider positively this proposal. At the same time, we also hope that the Secretary-General will continue to play a positive role in maintaining close contacts with both sides and will urge both sides to exercise restraint, demonstrate flexibility and seek solutions that are acceptable to both sides to stop the violence and resume peace talks.

We have noted that the new Israeli Government has indicated that achieving peace has become a central task and it has particularly emphasized that peace should be achieved with words instead of bullets. The leaders of both sides have recently indicated their wish to resume peace talks, and this has provided a fresh opportunity to restore the peace process. This opportunity must be seized, for it could easily be missed. We hope that both parties will consider their long-term interests, make sound judgements about the general climate, seize the opportunity and translate their positive political will into concrete actions as early as possible.

China has consistently, positively and actively supported the peace process in the Middle East. We strongly believe that achieving peace and stability in the Middle East is a common aspiration of the people of the region. It is in the fundamental interest of all the countries of the region. It is also in the interest of the international community, including China.

The peace process in the Middle East has now entered a very critical period. The immediate priority is for Palestine and Israel to stop the violence and resume peace talks. The relevant United Nations resolutions on the Middle East, particularly resolution 242 (1967) and resolution 338 (1973), which were adopted unanimously by the Security Council, and the land-for-peace principle, which has been universally recognized by the international community, are the basic guidelines for achieving peace. It is imperative that the parties concerned implement fully and effectively the agreements concluded and commitments undertaken. This is a realistic way to stop the violence and get the Middle East peace process out of its present deadlock. China is ready to work with the international community and will, as always, contribute its own efforts towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East at an early date.

Mr. Cunningham (United States): The situation in the Middle East is exceedingly precarious. We all realize that. In this highly combustible atmosphere, the international community needs to consider both its words and its actions very carefully. We should concentrate on developing ways to initiate, encourage and support the parties' own efforts to end the violence, to restore confidence and to return to negotiations.

Unfortunately, violence breeds violence; actions breeds reaction; mistakes are made; and tensions mount. We wish it were otherwise, but violence cannot and will not be halted from the outside. Nor will it be ended by charges and counter-charges and heated rhetoric.

Yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres met with the Security Council and conveyed several important points. First, he underscored that security for Israelis and Palestinians depended on the two parties, not outside forces or an international presence. Secondly, he reminded us that peace cannot be imposed and asked the Council to support peace, not one side or the other. As Ambassador Wang and others have pointed out in our discussion already, both sides say that they want the dialogue, the peace process, to go forward. We should be encouraging that and not make it more complicated by inopportune action by the Council outside of a context that foresees a result that the parties agreed to.

Mr. Peres reaffirmed the commitment of the Government of Israel to the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings and to the Mitchell fact-finding commission, inviting them to conduct a thorough review of the situation. That is certainly a welcome step. He informed us that the commission will be in Israel next week and urged the Council to postpone deliberations on next steps until we have a report from that body. He also confirmed that Prime Minister Sharon will be in New York on 21 March to meet the Secretary-General. We welcome these ongoing efforts and the new Israeli Government's engagement with the United Nations.

We want the Security Council to support peace and dialogue. It cannot do so if it acts precipitously. It can only do so in support of both Israel and the Palestinians. The United States remains firmly committed to ensuring that the Council does not adopt any resolution that is not supported by both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Last December the Council wisely decided not to adopt a resolution calling for the premature establishment of an international presence in the region. The Council sent a clear and unmistakable signal at that time. The message was simple and clear. It was that we all look forward to a time when the parties reach an agreement and turn to the Council for support and assistance in implementing it. It is entirely possible that an international presence that has an achievable mandate will be a part of that implementation effort. At that time of prospective peace, the United States will join with the rest of the Council in giving full support to the parties' own efforts to secure the final blessings of peace.

Much as we may hope otherwise, the road to peace does not begin in this Chamber. It must begin anew in the region. The Council has already expressed its support for an end to all the violence and a return to dialogue. For now, the Council's mission, and indeed the mission of every member of the United Nations, must be to encourage the parties to end the violence, to come together in peaceful negotiations and to make the difficult choices necessary to reach a final status agreement. Suggesting that the Council can somehow impose itself between the parties and play a constructive role by observing violence only serves to divert the parties from the absolute necessity to meet and shape their shared destiny, which is a just and lasting peace that provides security and dignity to Palestinians and Israelis alike. The United States Government is committed to that goal.

Sir Jeremy Greenstock (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): It is right that the Council should be addressing the situation in the Middle East, because there is widespread and deep concern across the United Nations membership at the continuing violence, at the closures of the occupied territories and the isolation of towns and villages within them. Above all, there is profound anxiety at the deteriorating prospects for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, which have implications well beyond the borders of Israel and the Palestinian areas.

The situation today is grim. Many roads inside Gaza and the West Bank are still closed, today. In the last two days, two Palestinians have died at checkpoints, delayed on their way to hospital. Thanks to the continued closure of Gaza airport, thousands of Palestinian pilgrims cannot return from Mecca. Tension is increasing, and that is a matter of immediate and international concern.

The Council has to live up to its responsibility to address peace and security in this region as elsewhere. We must find a way forward that improves the situation, not worsens it. We must find a way forward that provides the maximum unity in the Council, to guide the parties towards a peaceful course. The United Kingdom is ready to contribute to that effort.

The United Kingdom, in support of the European Union position which will later be set out in full by the Union presidency, has repeatedly pressed the Israeli Government to end the practices of closure and extrajudicial killings. The Israeli Government has told us that these measures are necessary for the protection of Israeli lives. But, in fact, these practices radicalize the Palestinian population and fuel violence in the occupied territories. Thus, they cannot achieve their stated purpose. We will continue to press the Israeli Government to end these practices, and in this regard I welcome the assurance by the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister yesterday to the Council that these measures would not comprise the policy of the new Israeli Government. We wish to see that fully put into effect.

A further step that needs to be taken is to resume the payments of revenues withheld from the Palestinian Authority. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority itself must make good-faith efforts to end the violence and to restore security cooperation.

So what needs to be done right away? Both parties must take urgent steps to reduce the violence and build confidence between them. Both parties must pursue contacts between them, for example, to make real progress in security cooperation. There is in reality no alternative to the parties themselves deciding to arrest the current cycle of violence and return to the path of negotiations. But the record — not least the melting away of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement — shows that they need help. That should be the purpose of any action the Council decides to take. We should always be thinking of how to improve conditions on the ground, for people on both sides. We should explore proposals that can achieve that goal.

We continue to believe, with France, Ireland, Norway and others, that an observer presence in the occupied territories could be beneficial, but that this can only be achieved with the acceptance of both parties. This issue should not be allowed to become a totem, dividing the parties and, still worse, the Security Council. It is the responsibility both of those who are traditionally supportive of Palestinian positions and of those traditionally supportive of Israeli positions to make a real effort to prevent such a harmful division occurring.

We have all made clear to the parties our conviction that an observer force could be useful. The parties bear the primary responsibility to agree how this might be possible. Our aim should be to encourage them to work together, not to polarize disputes and perpetuate the breakdown in constructive dialogue.

The Council has a challenge before it. We have to make this a common endeavour: how to maximize the prospects for renewed negotiations; how to help the parties move back from violence; and how we can give them practical support on the ground.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): It is almost a decade since the first Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid in 1991. At the time, we were filled with hope and expectations. For the first time the two sides recognized each other's right to exist and vowed to work together towards peace.

Over the last six months, the situation in the Middle East has deteriorated dramatically. The situation is critical, both in terms of the overall security situation and the level of violence and acts of terrorism. We have also seen a worsening of the human rights situation, the living conditions for the Palestinians and the fiscal situation for the Palestinian Authority.

There is no alternative to peace. In our view, the peace process is the only viable way of resolving the difference between the parties. However, it will take a lot of time and effort to bring the peace process back on track. Building a sustainable peace means finding a balance of interest and establishing mutual trust between the parties. If the Security Council is to play a constructive role in order to achieve this aim, we need a common approach and a common platform. The priority at this stage should be to halt the violence and to stabilize the situation. Furthermore, we should strongly encourage confidence-building measures, in order to re-establish the dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians. The Security Council should be a bridge-builder and should strive to achieve the broadest possible agreement on issues related to peace and security in the region.

Norway has repeatedly urged the parties to resume the negotiations and to renew their dialogue on security issues. We have also called on both Israel and the Palestinians to bring an end to violence. While we understand Israel's security needs, Israel must also respect the safety and security of the Palestinians. Furthermore, we have urged the Israeli Government to lift the closure of the West Bank and Gaza and to transfer the outstanding tax revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority. We have also called on Israel to freeze settlement activities.

The basis of any solution to the present crisis must be Security Council resolutions 242 (1967)and 338 (1973)and other relevant United Nations resolutions. Norway also wants to stress that the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war, is fully applicable to the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We urge Israel as the occupying Power to comply with its legal obligations and responsibilities under the said Convention.

Norway supports the idea of an international observer presence. If such a presence is to play a meaningful role, it must have the full support of both parties. We therefore call on the Secretary-General to continue his consultations with the parties to ascertain when and within what framework such a presence might appropriately be established in the area.

The Sharm el-Sheikh fact-finding committee, of which the Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorbjorn Jagland is a member, is due to visit Israel and the Palestinian area next week. In our view, the committee can play a moderating role in the present situation and assist in charting the way ahead.

Norway believes that the Security Council has a clear role to play in the continuing quest for peace in the Middle East. We should do what we can to bring the parties back to the negotiating table and bring the present situation of violence and bloodshed to an end.

Mr. Ryan (Ireland): I wish to associate my delegation fully with the statement to be made shortly by the Permanent Representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

Ireland has long desired a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We believe this can only be brought about on the basis of an agreement that respects Israel's right to peace and security and, at the same time, secures the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. It is greatly regretted that the hard work to achieve a final status agreement solution during the lifetime of the previous Israeli Government did not bear fruit and that once again the Palestinian territories have been engulfed in violence.

There are deep differences regarding the causes of, and responsibility for, the violence. It is clear, however, that the current phase of violence arises primarily out of the frustration to which long years of occupation have given rise. The Foreign Ministers of the European Union, in their ministerial declaration of 15 November last, pointed out that the lack of progress achieved in the peace process, including on the problem of the settlements, lies at the heart of the Palestinian people's frustration and of the violence.

My authorities were concerned and horrified at the widespread use of lethal force against Palestinians and at the failure to use non-lethal methods that are so readily available, especially in the early stages of the current disturbances. Last October, the Council quite properly condemned the excessive use of force, in resolution 1322 (2000). The European Union warned at that time that the disproportionate use of force would only aggravate the situation further. This warning was not heeded and was, unfortunately, vindicated by the tragic events which followed.

I wish to stress that we also condemn in the strongest terms the ongoing attacks on Israeli people. They are utterly wrong in themselves and they will do nothing to bring about the justice desired and deserved by the Palestinian people.

The current situation has given rise to a particularly vicious nexus of problems that have very serious political, economic, social and moral ramifications. There is the mounting violence, the failure on both sides to live up to the commitments made at Sharm el-Sheik, the collective punishments, the closures and restrictions on movement, the resultant devastating impact on the Palestinian people and on the Palestinian economy, the disastrous financial situation of the Palestinian Authority, the increasing terrorism, the extrajudicial killings, and the receding prospect for Israel of secure and recognized borders and acceptance in its region. I have enumerated these matters not with the purpose of holding either of the parties up to obloquy, but rather to emphasize the dimensions of the problem, its international character, and the responsibility of the Security Council in relation to it.

There is a clear and urgent need for a committed return to the negotiating process. This requires positive action. It requires engagement, not disengagement. It requires the full support of all around this table and of all Members of the United Nations. The message that goes out from this debate must not be one of negativity or barren recrimination. Reprehensible actions must be condemned by the Council: that is no more than our duty. But beyond that, there is a need to be forward-looking and to offer understanding, encouragement and support.

Yesterday we heard from Deputy Prime Minister Peres of the Israeli Government's decision to ease the closures and blockades and to enable the restoration of some normality to the lives of the Palestinian people. We welcome this positive decision, and we will watch developments in this regard carefully. We heard, too, that the Israeli Government would now cooperate with the fact-finding mission. This is also important and positive, and we look forward to the follow-through. We will also follow this process, carefully.

More is needed. The revenues due to the Palestinian Authority must be restored to it. It is simply not in the interests of peace, and it cannot be in the interest of Israel itself, for the financial and institutional situation of its interlocutor to be undermined and possibly destroyed.

There is a need to re-establish continuity in the peace process. No partner should be asked to accept a situation where it is obliged every so often to restart negotiations from a different position. It is self-evident that this cannot make for a viable and stable process.

The Security Council a long time ago established the basis for a solution in the form of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). For a long time — since the establishment of the Madrid principles and especially since the Oslo Agreement — the Council has stood aside and left it to the parties, with the assistance of mediators, to advance the peace process and to achieve a final settlement on a basis that meets the essential interests of all sides.

The peace process has been in difficulties before. This time, however, the difficulties are so grievous and the international ramifications so potentially grave that my Government are convinced that the Council must again look closely at all elements of the situation and work to help the parties to resolve the conflict.

The proposal for an international observer mission, which has been raised by a number of delegations, has the potential to help the parties in the current situation. I would appeal to the Israeli delegation and the Israeli authorities not to characterise this proposal as something it is not, and was never intended to be. There is no suggestion that this observer mission could prevent individual acts of terrorism. There is no question of it interposing itself between opposing forces or being able to stop a riot. Neither can it reasonably be regarded as an incitement to violence. The fear has been expressed that the presence of observers would induce Palestinians to stage violent events with the aim of provoking repressive action. On the contrary, unlike television cameras, experienced international military and police observers would readily detect riots, stone-throwing or other forms of violence that are mounted with the object of inducing repression and would report accordingly to all sides concerned.

The Ambassador of Singapore perhaps put it best at yesterday's private meeting when he said that a monitoring mission could act as a catalyst in breaking down the psychological barriers to a resumption of the peace process. Deputy Prime Minister Peres in fact referred in stark terms to these psychological barriers yesterday. It goes without saying that it is very important that any such measure is formulated so as to receive the widest possible support in the Council.

I was very pleased to hear this morning the welcome expressed by the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the meeting yesterday between Deputy Prime Minister Peres and the Security Council. I agree with Ambassador Al-Kidwa that this was good and that Mr. Peres is indeed a veteran politician. Israel's engagement with the Council was a most welcome development. We hope and believe that this should lead to an ongoing framework for engagement and cooperative dialogue with Minister Peres and his Government. It is of the highest importance that it should do so. In this regard, we look forward very much to Prime Minister Sharon's forthcoming meeting with the Secretary-General.

I very much hope that Mr. Peres yesterday, and Israeli people in general today, will take from the tenor of our discussions the message that the United Nations and the Security Council seek only to promote peace between Israel and its neighbours. If we have pointed to some hard facts, it is solely with the objective of promoting necessary careful reassessment of certain practices that, in our considered judgement, are obstacles to peace. We suggest that it is in Israel's own overall national interest to do so. We suggest careful assessment of our comments and advice on that basis.

Ireland, for its part, will seek to encourage and support action by the Council that will make a real contribution to ending the tragic conflict between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, which has disfigured the entire region for far too long.

Mr. Valdivieso (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome this opportunity to exchange opinions on the situation of the occupied territories, which is a matter of great concern to my delegation and, as we have seen from today's debate, to the entire international community.

Yesterday we had the opportunity to listen to Mr. Shimon Peres, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel. We would like to thank him for having been the one to ask to come to convey to the members of the Security Council the views of the new Government of Israel on the current situation. At yesterday's meeting we had an opportunity to convey to Mr. Peres and to the Permanent Observer of the Palestine the views of the members of the Council on the situation of the occupied territories. We hope that both parties also listen to what the other Members of the Organization think about the situation in Palestine.

The current wave of violence is lamentable, given the fact that a few months ago the parties were very close to reaching an agreement. The history lesson is clear: we should take advantage of opportunities for peace, and we should bear in mind that it is easier to erode a peace process than it is to build one. The current wave of violence is unacceptable because it takes the region back to the situation that prevailed nearly 10 years ago.

A great deal has been said about the disproportionate Israeli response to what was initially a street protest by young people throwing stones. Violence breeds further violence. That violence takes on a momentum of its own that later is more difficult to stop. In this regard, we would like to call on all the parties to take all necessary steps to end the violence and bring the situation back to normal so as to be able to resume negotiations on a basis acceptable to all.

It is crucial that financial remittances be resumed, as there is a risk of strangling the Palestinian economy — something that would have unforeseeable humanitarian consequences and could eventually lead to an escalation of violence.

The parties should determine the basis for discussions while taking into account the progress previously achieved. In addition, the leadership of the Palestinian Authority should be maintained. In summary, it is necessary to return to the path of cooperation in order to improve security and make possible the restoration of a minimum level of trust to end the current wave of violence and re-establish the conditions that will enable progress towards a definitive agreement.

The volatility of the situation in the Middle East is well known. Current events clearly pose a threat to international peace and security. In that regard, it is necessary that the Security Council continue its permanent review of the situation in order to comply with its responsibilities.

My delegation believes that an international presence under the auspices of the United Nations would be a catalyst for the restoration of peace in the occupied territories. We hope that today's deliberations will send clear signals about the unanimous expectations and wishes of the community of nations for peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Maiga (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I would like to express my gratitude to you, Mr. President, for convening this public meeting of the Security Council to debate the serious violent situation that continues to prevail in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Mali is keenly concerned at the continuing violence in the occupied Palestinian territories. We believe that unless these tragic events are dealt with quickly, they will be a real threat to peace and security in the entire Middle East.

Mali firmly condemns acts of repression and the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli army that has claimed over 437 victims, mostly among Palestinian civilians. Likewise, we consider Israel's frequent recourse to collective punishment and its use of all types of restrictions against the population of the territories to be counterproductive. The blockade of the territories has made the daily life of the Palestinians a genuine nightmare and has also caused considerable economic losses.

No legitimate struggle, even against terrorism, which we condemn terrorism in all its forms, can justify the imposition of such measures. We urge all of the parties to demonstrate restraint and moderation, to refrain from acts of provocation and to work together for the return of calm.

The present violence can end only with the signing of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace agreement based on the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the agreements signed by the parties. We consider that the Security Council has an essential role to play in this regard.

In accordance with the Charter, the Council has the obligation to work to establish confidence-building measures between the parties that can put an end to violence and restore a climate conducive to the resumption without conditions of negotiations on the final status of the territories.

In addition, my delegation believes that it is Israel's obligation to ensure respect for the holy sites and to guarantee the protection of the civilian Palestinian population.

Israel, the occupying Power, must strive to ensure scrupulous respect for the norms of international humanitarian law, as well as for the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Once again, we join Palestine in asking the Security Council for the speedy establishment of an international observer mission in the territories entrusted with ensuring the protection of civilians.

In this spirit, Mali fully supports the démarche of the non-aligned caucus and other members of the Council to hold discussions with the parties with a view to the prompt and effective deployment of observers in the field. We urge the Israeli Government to assist the international community in making this idea a reality, as a confidence-building measure for the good of both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

The situation is tragic, and we have been talking about a setback in the peace process at a time when a peace agreement was within reach. Nevertheless, there are grounds for hope. This is why my delegation welcomes the decision taken by the Israeli Government, announced to us yesterday by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, to start to lift the internal blockade between Palestinian cities in order to make the daily life of the civilian population less difficult. This is a positive measure that could contribute significantly to improving the living conditions of the inhabitants of the territories and mitigate the present level of violence. Beyond that measure, which we once again hail, what we are expecting from Israel is the end of the blockade of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in order to allow Palestinians to enter Israel to go to work.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the support of my delegation for the efforts made by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to bring the parties closer in order to bring about a resumption of the peace process. We also request the international community to provide the needed humanitarian and economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

Mr. Neewoor (Mauritius): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for holding this important meeting of the Security Council to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We believe that this meeting requested by the Arab League is appropriate and very timely for the following reasons.

First, the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which was halted several months ago as it moved into the final rounds towards a negotiated settlement, remains stalled, with no visible prospect for early resumption.

Secondly, the violence between Palestinians and Israelis, which started in September last year and which has already taken a heavy toll of lives on both sides, particularly among the Palestinians, continues, albeit at a lesser level but with no end in sight, and clouds the prospects for negotiations to start again.

Thirdly, the blockade of the Palestinian territories by Israel is inflicting untold suffering on the Palestinian people, who not only are deprived of their freedom of movement but are also unable to earn their normal livelihood. It also imposes great economic and financial hardship on the Palestinian Authority by denying essential revenues to which it is entitled.

Fourthly, in Israel a new Government under the leadership of Mr. Ariel Sharon was sworn into office last week following the recent elections, and Israel should be in a position again to resume negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.

In the atmosphere of the continuing stalemate, more than enough violence has occurred, with the loss of many precious lives. The stalemate must end, and negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority must resume without further delay. We believe that the international community should do all it can to encourage the two sides to get back to the task of negotiating a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question. The Security Council in particular must assume its responsibility in this regard.

The Security Council had the opportunity to hear Mr. Shimon Peres, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, yesterday afternoon, and we were reassured by his statement that peace is at the centre of the policies of the new Israeli Government. The Council also heard yesterday the Ambassador of the Observer Mission of Palestine, Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, who also reaffirmed the commitment of the Palestinian Authority to peace in the Middle East. According to Mr. Peres, it is high emotions rather than politics that are preventing the peace process from moving forward.

The other reason given in this regard by Mr. Peres is the continuation of violence. Ambassador Al-Kidwa, on the other hand, gave the Council a vivid picture of the frustration of the Palestinian people and their suffering under Israel's occupation and blockade.

We would like to say to both the Israelis and the Palestinians that the two peoples have only one destiny, and that is peaceful coexistence in mutual trust. There is no other option, and to search for one is supremely futile. It has been so in the past; it is so now; and it will be so in the future. The right of the Palestinian people to an independent State is unquestionable, and so is the right of the Israelis to exist as a nation with secure borders. The rest are matters of detail that the two sides must work out at the negotiating table in a spirit of mutual accommodation, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Israel has been insisting that all violence must end before negotiations can resume. In our view, the best and surest way to end the ongoing cycle of violence is to deploy a United Nations observer force in the occupied territories. This was suggested yesterday to Mr. Shimon Peres by several delegations, including Mauritius, in the Security Council. We hope the Israeli Government will respond favourably to this important proposal. The Security Council will shortly consider a draft resolution on the Middle East that must include such a proposal, and my delegation will fully support the adoption of the draft resolution by the Council.

Last but not least, I wish to emphasize that the starting point for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority should be where the negotiations stood when the two sides last met. It took a long time and enormous patience and skill on both sides for the negotiations to reach that critical point from the early beginnings of the Oslo process. The important gains already achieved must be preserved and should constitute the foundation for future negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Mahbubani (Singapore): The Charter gives the Security Council primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. By exercising this global role, the Security Council can promote the observance of international law, which guides the conduct of States.

As a small State, Singapore has an interest in strengthening the role of international law and thus in a strong and effective Security Council. This includes the implementation of all — I repeat, all — Security Council resolutions, including those fulfilling the Council's obligation to protect civilians in armed conflict, as declared in several resolutions and presidential statements, including resolution 1314 (2000) of 11 August 2000. The Council should live up to the standards that it has set for itself. Most importantly, resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the most recent resolution on this item, resolution 1322 (2000), must be implemented.

Yesterday, the Security Council had the opportunity of meeting with the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Mr. Shimon Peres, and the Permanent Observer of Palestine in separate private meetings. We welcome this acknowledgement of the Security Council's role. At these meetings, Council members sent a clear message about their concerns over the mounting and continuing violence, particularly Israel's widespread use of disproportionate force and the blockade of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which, as several speakers have noted today, have had profound effects on the Palestinian people. It is therefore timely for the Security Council to now listen to the views of the other members of the international community.

Over the long term, the protection of civilians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank can be granted only if peace negotiations are put back on track. We welcome the assurances of Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres and the Permanent Observer of Palestine, Ambassador Nasser Al-Kidwa, that peace remains their strategic objective. We hope that many of the elements of previous attempts at peace negotiations can be picked up from where they were left off.

To make this possible, our immediate priority must be to stop the violence. Having chosen peace as their strategic objective, we call on all parties to renounce violence. The primary responsibility for stopping the violence and for creating conditions conducive to peace negotiations being resumed as soon as possible clearly falls on the parties involved. The Security Council can help them to fulfil this responsibility by introducing neutral and objective confidence-building measures.

One of the proposals that the Security Council is actively discussing is the establishment of a United Nations observer force. We believe that an impartial and neutral international presence can serve as a confidence-building measure to change the psychological atmosphere in the occupied territories and help to neutralize the environment. As Ambassador Richard Ryan of Ireland noted earlier, we said yesterday that such a force can play a vital catalytic role by reducing the level of violence and by changing the chemistry of the troubled region. We note that the Ambassador of Colombia also referred to the possible catalytic role of such a force. We believe that such a force will complement the role that Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his representatives on the ground, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Mitchell fact-finding commission established by the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement can all play in trying to defuse the immediate crisis.

Singapore would therefore like the Council to further explore how such a proposal for an observer force can be operationalized. One way of doing so is to task the Secretary-General with consulting with all the parties. Another possibility is for the Security Council to despatch its own mission to the region. Since the Security Council has hosted visits by both President Yasser Arafat and Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres in recent months, it should reciprocate these gestures by sending its own team to continue these useful and constructive dialogue.

Now more than ever, we believe that all the parties involved and the international community should take bold steps towards putting the Middle East back on the road of peace. We should build on existing peace agreements and the truce framework, and not undermine them. Every accord that we have reached on the Middle East — the Camp David accords, the Madrid Conference, the Oslo peace agreements — represents crucial a step forward. We have some strong foundations and we should build on them.

Mr. Ahsan (Bangladesh): We, too, are grateful to you, Sir, for scheduling this important and timely meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and East Jerusalem has been deteriorating for some time now. Mindless violence continues and the defenceless Palestinian population bears the brunt, with hundreds dead, thousands injured and properties destroyed. My delegation would like to express sincere condolences to the families of the victims.

Excessive use of force has fuelled the dangerous escalation of violence. The policy of collective punishment, inflicted by Israel through the imposition of a blockade and closures, is crippling the economy. This has caused intense hardship, unemployment and deprivation. The net result has been a worrisome crisis of confidence, leading to what the Secretary-General has characterized as the unravelling of the progress that had been made between Israelis and Palestinians in moving towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

The Security Council cannot watch this situation continue, as it only strengthens those who do not want peace. We believe, first of all, that further escalation of violence must be prevented. The onus is on those who insist on using lethal force on civilians. The commitment to peace has to be demonstrated in practice by reversing these actions on the ground. As the situation deteriorates, the Security Council must re-engage itself and continue to explore a way out of this crisis, which is truly an international one, as the Ambassador of the United Kingdom reaffirmed today. We believe that the proposal to establish an international observer force is a good basis for the Council's deliberations and we fully support it.

In our view, the Council is unanimous on the need for the immediate and unconditional lifting of the economic blockade. We agree with the Secretary-General that donor assistance is absolutely critical to alleviating the hardship of the Palestinian population. We appreciate the role that the European Union has played in this regard and encourage it to continue its assistance.

Nobody is under the illusion that the negotiation of a final settlement is easy. However, the parties must be encouraged to continue efforts to achieve their objective through peaceful negotiation. We also believe that it is important to preserve the gains made by the painful efforts of both sides to date and to build upon that. The initiative of the Deputy Prime Minister of Israel to come to the Council was appreciated by all here yesterday. We believe that it is a clear recognition by Israel of the Council's role in this issue. That role is as relevant today as it was at the time of the adoption of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which together constitute the framework for a final settlement.

Bangladesh strongly supports the Secretary-General's role in facilitating the Sharm el-Sheikh understanding. We believe that he can also play a constructive role in helping both sides return to the negotiating table. The Security Council must work towards that end.

Miss Durrant (Jamaica): Mr. President, let me join others in thanking you for convening this public meeting of the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. This has given members and non-members of the Council an opportunity to review developments over the last six months.

Today the plight of the Palestinians in the occupied territories has reached desperate proportions, further threatening the stability of the whole region and thereby posing a threat to international peace and security.

Yesterday the Council held two very important meetings which provided a useful backdrop to today's discussions. First, the Council met with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the new Government of Israel, Shimon Peres, at his request. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs outlined his Government's perspective on the problems bedeviling the people of Palestine and of Israel. He outlined what he saw as the basis for restarting the peace process between the Palestinians and the Israelis, and outlined actions contemplated and to be taken by Israel in this regard.

The Jamaican delegation welcomes the steps announced by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs to open up avenues of commerce and to begin to reverse a policy which has revisited economic devastation on the Palestinians. We expect to see early results on the ground, reflected in an improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinians.

Immediately after the meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Security Council met with Ambassador Al-Kidwa, the

Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations. He shared with us the Palestinians' perspective on the prevailing conditions in the Palestinian territories. He confirmed for us much of what has been reported over the past few months and gave us reasons why the peace process has been derailed. My delegation expressed the hope that yesterday's meetings would usher in a new era of relations between the United Nations, the Palestinians and the Israelis in the search for peace.

While both sides clearly saw the causes and effects differently, they both made it absolutely clear that they both wanted peace and that they wanted to end the cycle of violence and coexist as good neighbours. However, for many complex and varied reasons, they have been unable to achieve that peace of which they spoke, and, despite several hopeful attempts, the peace which they have sought for many years has eluded them.

My delegation believes that the Security Council must offer its help and its support for the peace process. Jamaica has in the past urged both the Palestinians and the Israelis to seek peace through an active negotiating process, a process which requires them to stay the course, no matter the obstacles that may confront them. As we have stated on previous occasions, recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination must be a principal element of this process. The right to security of all countries in the region, including that of Israel, must also be assured. We reiterate this position today. Jamaica offers its continued support in efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace within the framework of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Last October the Security Council adopted resolution 1322 (2000), which called for the immediate cessation of violence and for all necessary steps to be taken to ensure that the cycle of violence is brought to an end. We urged the parties to refrain from new and provocative actions and to work towards a situation of normalcy in a way that promoted the prospects of peace. We gave full support to the important role of the Secretary-General in the peace process. We condemned the acts of violence, especially the excessive use of force against Palestinians. We called upon Israel to abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and its responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. We stressed the importance of establishing a mechanism for a speedy and objective inquiry into the violent events. The Mitchell commission was subsequently established, but so far no results have been seen of its inquiry. Yesterday, however, Mr. Peres advised us that the commission had been invited to visit Israel next week. We look forward to positive results from that visit.

Last October, the then Prime Minister of Israel and the President of the Palestinian Authority made commitments to Secretary-General Kofi Annan to resolve their differences by peaceful means. We saw this as a very important development. Those of us who desire to see peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis welcomed the brave actions contemplated by the parties and dared to hope that, at long last, there was the requisite political will to end the conflict. In the wake of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit and the agreement reached, we had hoped that further loss of life would be avoided. The peoples of Palestine and of Israel no doubt saw a glimmer of hope in the decisions taken at that time by their leaders.

Needless to say, my delegation has been very disappointed by what has taken place since then. The Sharm el-Sheikh agreement has not been implemented; we have seen a drift further away from peace; many lives, particularly Palestinian lives, have been lost; and economic devastation has descended upon the Palestinian people. We are deeply concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories and the reported lack of access by humanitarian workers to those in need. We believe that all barriers to humanitarian relief reaching the Palestinian people must be removed without delay.

In light of this, and in spite of the intractable nature of the problems facing both sides, we maintain that, if the political will exists to make bold decisions for peace and to carry out those decisions, with the help of the Security Council and the United Nations as a whole, perhaps we can then move forward to bring peace to the peoples of the region.

In December, Jamaica supported the sending of United Nations observers to Palestine, a position which did not at that time receive the support of the majority of the members of the Security Council. We believed then, as we do now, that the deployment of United Nations observers could act as a deterrent to further violence and as a confidence-building measure between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

While we delay, the violence rages on, and many lives continue to be lost. As the Permanent Representative of Singapore reminded us, the Council has repeatedly expressed its concern about the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Other members of the Council have spoken today of some of the things that the Security Council should and must do. We are almost in unanimity that action by the Security Council is urgently needed. While we have not yet achieved unanimity on what needs to be done and how, we are working to achieve this. We join others who support revisiting the issue of the deployment of United Nations observers in Palestine. We join other members of the Council in calling for Israel to act immediately to remove all economic blockades and closures, and to take decisive action to restore the economic viability of the Palestinian territories. We reiterate our call to both sides to bring an end to the violence and to sit down together, face to face, and to resume negotiations.

Over the course of the next few days, the Security Council will be working on a draft resolution to reflect the concerns expressed in this meeting and to give meaning to the aspirations for peace in the Middle East. We urge all parties to show the maximum flexibility and to assist us in this endeavour.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Ukraine.

Today's formal meeting of the Security Council — the third during the past two days to address the dangerous crisis in the Middle East — and the considerable number of speakers participating in the deliberations testify not only to the gravity of the situation but also to the active efforts by the Council to contribute to easing tension and defusing the present crisis.

My country remains deeply concerned at the current deterioration in the Middle East, which has been going on for more than five months. We are alarmed by daily reports of continued clashes between Israelis and Palestinians, which have already claimed the lives of more than 400 people, most of whom are Palestinians, with thousands wounded. We mourn the victims of this bloodshed and express our sincere condolences to their bereaved families.

As has been stated by my delegation on many previous occasions, Ukraine condemns the excessive and indiscriminate use of force against Palestinian civilians. Any attacks or reprisals against the civilian population are legally prohibited and inadmissible. Full respect for the Fourth Geneva Convention should be ensured.

We are of the firm view that Israel has to lift its economic blockade against Palestinians as soon as possible, since it has placed the Palestinian Authority on the verge of economic collapse and has simply doubled, if not tripled, the number of the Palestinian protesters. Evidently, the continuation of the settlement activities on Palestinian territory is not helping to remedy the situation either.

Proceeding from this stand, we are encouraged by the recent decision of the new Government of Israel to start lifting the economic closure of the Palestinian territory, as well as its intentions to stop the settlement activities in it.

Likewise, my country recognizes the legitimate right of Israel to live within secure and internationally recognized borders. Ukraine absolutely rejects any acts of terrorism, by whomsoever committed, by anyone as a means of reaching any political goal. In our view, any violent or provocative actions by radical elements should be halted resolutely since they lead only to a further escalation of violence. In this context, the acts of violence against the Israelis are equally condemned in my country.

It is our belief that under the current circumstances there is no alternative for the parties but to end any acts of violence against each other immediately and unconditionally, to overcome their animosity and, for the sake of peace, to come back to the negotiating table. At this juncture, we reiterate our appeal to the Israelis and the Palestinians to show maximum restraint and prudence and to refrain from any unilateral actions which could further aggravate the situation or pre-empt the outcome of the final status talks.

It is our conviction that both parties should resume their negotiations as soon as possible on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), including the principle of land for peace, as well as the principles laid down at the Madrid Conference and in the Oslo Agreement. Undoubtedly, the understandings reached at Sharm el-Sheikh last year should be implemented in full; the measures to restore effective cooperation between the sides in the field of security should be undertaken. We stress the importance of maintaining the direct Israeli-Palestinian contacts, including at the highest level.

In this regard, we took note with satisfaction of the news about the recent exchange of messages between the Palestinian leader and the new Prime Minister of Israel being done in a fairly constructive manner. What is important is that in their messages both leaders affirmed a mutual desire to achieve peace. It is our hope that these positive signals will undergo further development.

We also regard positively the new Government of Israel's seeking the establishment of closer dialogue with the Security Council, as was confirmed yesterday during the meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel Mr. Shimon Peres.

We continue to believe that in the current circumstances the international presence in the Palestinian territory may become an important factor contributing to the speedy restoration of security conditions and the resumption of talks. In our view, the idea of the establishment of the United Nations observer mission, as put forward by France, the United Kingdom and some others, responds to the interests of both Palestinians and Israelis and deserves to be seriously considered by the Council. At the same time, it is understandable that in practical terms this idea cannot be implemented without the cooperation of Israel, which should be encouraged to reconsider its current negative attitude to it.

Ukraine upholds the position that the Security Council should maintain its active involvement in the search for ways to halt the current crisis in the Middle East. My country will welcome the continuation of the constructive engagement of the Secretary-General in the efforts aimed at bringing peace and security to the region. In particular, we encourage the Secretary-General to pursue his mandate, conferred upon him by the Council last fall, to negotiate with the parties on the acceptable modalities of the United Nations observer mission.

It is also our hope that further activities of the fact-finding commission, as outlined in Security Council resolution 1322 (2000), and agreed upon at the summit meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh, will continue to play a positive role in bringing the level of violence down. We welcome the visit by the commission to the region next week, and we look forward to hearing the reports on the results of its findings in Israel and Palestine.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Ukraine's determination to contribute further to the process of restoring a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, which, in our view, will come about only with the realization of the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to their self-determination and statehood.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mauritania and Morocco, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Najad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr. Ould Deddach (Mauritania) and Mr. Snoussi (Morocco) took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: The next speaker on my list is the representative of Egypt. I invite him to take seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Aboulgheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. I have every confidence in your skill and wisdom as you conduct and steer the deliberations of the Council on this important subject, and I express the hope that the Security Council will carry out its role as set out in the Charter and in the manner that the international community desires in order to maintain security in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The essence of the crisis, whose horrific destructive effects the occupied Palestinian territories have been experiencing for more than five months, lies in one main issue: the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, which is basically the detonator of all the bloody events that the world has been witnessing, events that have continued unabated since last September.

Israel can portray the issue in many guises. It can mix facts and point the finger of blame in all directions in order to come up with a single conclusion, according to which the occupied people, the people whose land is occupied, are equated with the occupying Power, which imposes on the occupied people a stifling siege aimed at starving them and bringing them to their knees. Despite all these rationalizations and misleading facts, the Council must not stray from the underlying reason behind the events. That is the reality of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory.

The facts tell us that the living conditions of the Palestinian people have not improved and will not improve, and that they will not enjoy stability until they are rid of the occupation in all its manifestations and forms.

Since the meeting of the Security Council to consider this issue on 22 November last year, there have been a number of successive political developments, not the least notable of which was the change of Government in Israel. Unfortunately, none of these developments have had the effect that some had hoped for in terms of reducing the scope, level and size of the military power and repression used by Israel against the Palestinian people. We can actually say that Israel has escalated its brutal treatment of the Palestinian people qualitatively since the new Government took office. This Government has chosen to implement a "suffocating siege" policy in the occupied territory, replacing what it called a "breathing siege" policy, which was said to have been in effect until a few days ago. We find these terms and descriptions not only disturbing but also, unfortunately, ludicrous.

For the information of the Council, such a siege of the occupied Palestinian territory means the transformation of every Palestinian city and village, including those under autonomous Palestinian control, into a large prison for its residents, a prison they are not allowed either to enter or leave. It also means the complete disruption of life and the strangulation of the Palestinians, who, I must say, deal with the whole situation with an uncommon bravery that earns the admiration of their Arab brethren and of free peoples throughout the world.

There is siege and closure, confiscation of land and demolition of homes, shelling of government and education facilities, and an organized policy to assassinate civilians without any regard for the norms of human rights observed throughout the world and without recourse to any judicial authority. Israeli civilian settlers, protected by a powerful military force, do whatever they wish in the Palestinian territory, attacking, stealing the Palestinians' water and burning their crops, all the while being defended by the Israeli army, which then proceeds to uproot trees that had existed for decades before Israel's establishment, using all the might of weaponry at its disposal to subjugate the Palestinians to Israel's will. It is the power of occupation.

All this activity transpires under one pretext Israel never ceases to repeat, presuming that it justifies all its actions: the pretext of security. I do not believe that this is anything more than an insult to our intelligence and to all that this Council stands for in terms of embodying the principles of law and human rights. Is it not strange that we are still listening to these pretexts after 10 years of negotiations without Israel being able to extend to the Palestinian people the only real concession required of it, which is to withdraw from their land, a land that it occupied by force in 1967?

Genuine security is a legitimate claim for all the peoples of the region. Nobody denies the right of any people to enjoy security. However, security cannot be obtained at the expense of one's own neighbours, and one cannot clamour for security while simultaneously killing the neighbours' children, demolishing their homes, strangling them and starving them. There is no logic to this, nor any justice.

Yesterday, 14 March, amid the current tense situation and bloody events, the report of the human rights inquiry commission established pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution S-5/1 of 19 October 2000, on human rights violations in the occupied territories, was issued (E/CN.4/2001/121). The report contains a detailed account of the tragic situation of the Palestinian people living under the repression of occupation. It outlines a set of important recommendations and conclusions. We urge the Council to examine them and to consider carrying them out. Perhaps the most important of these recommendations is contained in chapter X, part II of the report, and I quote from paragraph 11 of chapter X, part II:

(*spoke in English*)

> "An adequate and effective international presence needs to be established to monitor and regularly report on compliance by all parties with human rights and humanitarian law standards in order to ensure full protection of the human rights of the people of the occupied territories. Such an international mechanism should be established immediately and constituted in such a manner as to reflect a sense of urgency about protecting the human rights of the Palestinian people."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

The conditions in the occupied territories have deteriorated to an extent that compels the Council to intervene, with all the authority that it has under the Charter, to put an end to the arrogance of power with which the occupation force handles the Palestinians in the Palestinian territories. Given this, the Council must consider, without procrastination or delay, establishing and deploying the international monitoring force requested by the international community, the Palestinians and the Arab side several months ago.

We are aware that some countries are encouraging the parties to resume negotiations. We have no argument with that, but it is only fair and just that when the Council asks for the resumption of negotiations, they must be based on all previous negotiations and not start in a vacuum. They should have as a clear objective the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) within a defined and acceptable time frame.

We heard it reported that Israel said in this Chamber yesterday that it had committed itself to the principle of land for peace and that it had given land to some Arab parties and was able to get only a cold peace in return. Everybody knows who is the subject of this contention. Egypt's answer to this is clear and unequivocal: the land that Egypt regained by wars, followed by negotiations, is Egyptian territory that was occupied by Israel. Peace among the two countries now is a peace governed by signed agreements, and nobody can doubt the extent to which Egypt is committed to these agreements, out of its sense of international responsibility. However, the temperature of the peace between two neighbouring peoples is based on the desire and will of these two peoples. It is only natural and logical that the Egyptian people would interact with the question of their Arab brethren whose land is occupied, and with the plight of the brotherly Palestinian people in particular.

When the Israeli approach to dealing with its neighbours is changed, when a real hand of peace is extended to them and when the Palestinian people have been liberated from Israeli occupation, only then can we open up and deal with the question of how warm or cold this peace is. At present, such talk is mere rhetoric. We can only describe this rhetoric as empty; it cannot change the facts on the ground.

Peace is everyone's objective. However, in the case of the Palestinian people the achievement of peace must be accomplished by Israel's respect for that people's rights to independence and to a dignified free life.

Before I end this intervention, I should like to direct my words to Ambassador Yehuda Lancry, the Ambassador of Israel.

(*spoke in English*)

Ambassador Yehuda Lancry, Ambassador of Israel, the problem again is the occupation. Today, I watched the BBC World at 7 o'clock in the morning. There were hundreds of Palestinians, women and children. They were in Ramallah. They were trying to demonstrate in a very peaceful manner. The response was bullets. The Israeli army was firing and shooting at civilians, those who were not even carrying rocks or stones. You will have peace with the Palestinians, but you will have that peace when you recognize that they are not inferiors, that their blood is as sacred as Jewish blood. You stop shooting at them. Your people are killing them and they count for nothing. The Palestinians are human beings and they are the equals of the Israelis.

The President: I thank the representative of Egypt for the kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list if the representative of Jordan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Al-Hadidi (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure at the outset, Mr. President, to extend our congratulations to you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I am confident that your wisdom, expertise and thorough knowledge will lead us to the desired success. I should also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Ben Mustapha, the Permanent Representative of Tunisia, for the marked efficiency with which he conducted the work of the Security Council during his presidency.

It gives me pleasure also to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this emergency meeting at the request of the Arab Group.

My delegation remains gravely concerned due to the deteriorating situation in the occupied Arab territories resulting from the continued Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and Israel's unjustified use of force that has assumed serious dimensions recently, thus threatening the stability and security of the region and the future of the peace process in its entirety.

My delegation reiterates its call to the international community to carry out its responsibilities vis-à-vis the suffering of the Palestinian people. We wish also to reiterate the necessity for concerted international action to halt acts of aggression against the Palestinians and to provide international protection to them through despatching an international observer force to the occupied territories under the auspices of the United Nations in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and with a view to preventing the recurrence of such aggression in the future.

In spite of the receding intensity of violence, the situation in the occupied territories is still extremely grave and tensions continue to rise. Israel must halt its use of force against the Palestinians and must lift the stifling economic blockade against Palestinian cities and villages. It must stop digging trenches around Palestinian cities and allow for normal communications between them, pay the financial entitlements of the Palestinian Authority without delay and return to the negotiating table with a view to implementing all agreements that have been concluded, including Sharm el-Sheikh, to put an end to this conflict.

The recent developments prove once again the urgent need for the Middle East to reach comprehensive and lasting peace and for Arab rights to be restored in their entirety, a matter that will not be realized without the application of the resolutions of international legitimacy.

In conclusion, we would like to reassert the need to focus on the revitalization of dialogue between the Israeli and the Palestinian parties and to bring the peace process back to its natural path with a view to realizing the desired objective, namely the establishment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

His Majesty the King of Jordan, the Jordanian Government and the Jordanian people reassert their solidarity with and support for their brotherly Palestinian people in its endeavour to regain its legitimate rights and to establish its own independent State on its territory, with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital. I should also like to express our heartfelt condolences to the Palestinian people and leadership for their fallen martyrs.

The President: I thank the representative of Jordan for the kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Yemen. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Al-Ashtal (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset, Mr. President, to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. We are confident that you will steer its deliberations to the desired success. I should also like to express our appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Said Ben Mustapha, Permanent Representative of Tunisia, for his personal efforts and for wisely and successfully guiding our deliberations last month.

I should also like to extend our deep thanks to you, Mr. President, and to the members of the Security Council for affording us the opportunity to discuss one of the oldest issues on the agenda of the United Nations, an issue that has lasted more than half a century, namely, the Palestinian question, which still awaits a just solution.

The current Israeli practices against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories are senseless, illogical and unbelievably harsh, cruel and gory. They have had catastrophic economic, social and human repercussions on the lives of civilians.

Of late, Israel has been dissecting Palestinian villages and cities, isolating Palestinian territories and cutting them off from each other and from the outside world. It has tightened its economic blockade against civilians and has refused to pay tax revenues due the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, settlements are being established, Palestinian homes are being destroyed and Palestinian families are being displaced. Excessive force is being used by regular army forces and trained security forces against children who are guilty only of refusing the continuing occupation of their land.

These are revealing indications of indiscriminate Israeli practices. They require the Council to shoulder its international responsibilities and take the necessary steps to urge Israel to respect the legitimate rights of the Palestinian peoples, in accordance with adopted international resolutions and with the principle of land for peace. In this context, we would ask that the Council accept the following points.

First, and most urgently, the Council should help put an end to violence against children and defenseless civilians. Secondly, the economic blockade should be lifted, barricades should be dismantled and the free movement of civilians should be guaranteed. Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority should be paid the tax revenues due it. These measures are desperately needed, which is why we ask the Council to exert pressure on Israel to implement them. They involve the lives of innocent civilians, whose suffering we witness daily and whose lives and property are fraught with danger, displacement and isolation.

On a different level, we request that the Council also take the following steps. The Council should agree to establish and deploy, in the occupied territories and under the aegis of the United Nations, an international force to protect the Palestinian people. Secondly, the Council should establish and deploy a fact-finding mission to look into Israeli practices against civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories. Palestinians need the presence of the United Nations; they need to have someone to report on what is happening in the occupied territories. This can only be achieved by dispatching a fact-finding mission to the region.

We in Yemen support the peace process in the Middle East. We believe it is an inescapable strategic choice. It is for that reason that we are calling for the resumption of negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties from the point where they left off.

The President: I thank the representative of Yemen for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Saudi Arabia. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to extend my congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. We are confident that your knowledge and experience will serve you in conducting the work of the Council in the manner to which we all aspire. I would also like to express our gratitude to our brother, the Permanent Representative of sisterly Tunisia, who conducted the work of the Council last month with wisdom and competence.

An examination of history will reveal many documents and testimonies accurately documenting all the massacres perpetrated by Israel against innocent Palestinian civilians — in Deir Yassin, Ayn Kibya, Gaza, Al-Husan, Qualquilya, Kafr Kassim, Khan Yunis, Rafa, Al-Quds, Ramallah and other cities and villages of Palestine. Israeli terrorism has even pursued Palestinians to Sabra and Shatila. The Mossad and its agents have pursued Palestinian personalities outside Palestine and have killed a large number of them. By admission of Israeli officials themselves, it is now known how those agents worked, and continue to work, to assassinate Palestinians using numerous terrorist methods, including bombing with helicopters and planes.

By deploying occupation forces around densely populated areas and Palestinian cities and villages, the Israeli authorities recently divided the West Bank into 43 sections and the Gaza Strip into four sections. This has led to greater isolation for those cities and villages, thereby limiting the movement of their citizens and deepening the suffocating economic blockade. This is an approach aimed at destroying the Palestinian entity from within, destroying the Palestinian economy and infrastructure and sabotaging national interests. This approach is also aimed at eradicating Palestinian society, which lives under blockade in geographical cantons in which Palestinians are separated from each other, from their brethren in the Arab world and from the outside world. Those inhumane and unjustified methods presage a dangerous deterioration in the security situation, add to the current tensions and demonstrate the true intentions of the new Israeli Government.

Israel describes the intifada as violence. It turns a blind eye to the fact that it is resistance to occupation, which is a legitimate right and, indeed, a national duty that has been exercised by all peoples to rid themselves of occupation and injustice. Current developments in occupied Palestine are not violence carried out by those who oppose peace, as Israel claims. No. They constitute a popular uprising that rejects surrender, the usurpation of the rights of Palestinians, the confiscation of Palestinian territory and the confinement of Palestinians to isolated areas where Israeli extremism is dominant and where they cannot even secure the basic necessities of life.

The Palestinian uprising is an expression and a reflection of the impatience of the Palestinians vis-à-vis the barrenness of the peace negotiations. The Palestinians have been offered so far the peace of time bombs, by which the Israeli side has insisted on imposing its conditions and adopting the approach of the victor towards the vanquished. Israel has discussed simple and commonsensical issues without talking about the basic issues — issues of destiny — to gain time and to impose new realities on the ground.

Whatever agreement is reached, Israel tries to empty it of its content. Israel prevaricates when it comes to making agreements and delays when it is asked to implement. The uprising has made the claims of Israel perfectly clear regarding its desire for peace. It has become obvious to the international community that Israel does not desire a peace based on justice and that it has no intention of recognizing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among which are the rights of return and self-determination and the right to establish an independent State, with Arab Jerusalem as its capital. Israel has showed no sincere and serious desire to establish a climate of confidence regionally and to coexist with its neighbours in security and peace.

The Commission on Human Rights sent a fact-finding mission led by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, in spite of all Israeli's attempts to mislead the Commission and its attempts to obstruct her movements by firing on her car to remind her of the fate of Count Bernadotte, who was assassinated by Zionist terrorist gangs. The Commission confirmed the suffering of the Palestinian people, their pain, their wounds and their continued tragedy.

The Palestinians have lost their territory; their houses have been demolished and they have experienced much suffering. Death has become a daily event for them. The father dies, and the son goes out the next morning carrying the picture of his martyred father. Then the son dies, and all of the fathers and mothers receive the hordes of people who come to pay their condolences.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia feels that Israel is the only party responsible for all these acts of aggression committed against the Palestinians. Therefore, we denounce and deplore all Israeli measures which run counter to all humane principles and all norms of the revealed religions and international law. We call upon the international community to prevail upon Israel to stop its continued aggression against Palestine and the Arabs.

The international community entrusted the Security Council with the task of maintaining international peace and security. The developments in occupied Palestine right now mean that the Security Council must assume its responsibility. It must adopt the necessary measures to protect the Palestinian people — to protect innocent children from the bullets of the occupiers, to protect the young people whose dreams die before they are even born and to protect mothers with tears in their eyes while they hold their dead sons and pray to God to rid them of the injustice of the occupiers.

The Council must adopt measures to protect the fathers and the elderly who have lost their sons and their grandsons to the occupation. It must do this to affirm the international responsibility of the United Nations vis-à-vis the question of Palestine, until it has been resolved in all its aspects. It must do this in implementation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, which applies to all territories occupied by Israel. It must do this in accordance with Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) and with the General Assembly resolution adopted during its emergency special session.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supports the Palestinian request that the Security Council assume its responsibility and implement its commitments to send an international observer force to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, to protect those who are still alive among the Palestinian civilian population. These are innocent people who only aim to recover their rights and to live like everybody else — like all nations, in peace, security and freedom.

Peace cannot be made through the hubris of the generals and their use of tanks and planes. It can be achieved only by accepting the terms of rights and by forcing the aggressor to stop its aggression and to end its occupation. Stability in the area is linked to the achievement of a comprehensive and just peace. The peace negotiations were based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. Just as peace cannot be dealt with piecemeal, the land cannot be partitioned either. In order for a just and comprehensive peace to be established, all Arab territories occupied since 1967 must be returned so that stability, security, understanding, coexistence and cooperation can be achieved.

The President: I thank the representative of Saudi Arabia for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Malaysia. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. Let me also join others in thanking you for your prompt response to the request, including from my delegation on behalf of the Islamic Group at the United Nations, for an urgent meeting of the Council to consider the grave situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Like other members of the international community, Malaysia continues to follow closely the grave developments there with the greatest of concern, in the fervent hope that the continuing violence will subside, thereby sparing the Palestinian people further needless deaths and injuries.

My delegation listened very carefully and with deep empathy to the statement made by the Permanent Observer of Palestine, to whom I am most grateful. I am also grateful to those speakers before me who have exposed the hostile and uncompromising policies maintained by successive Israeli Governments while they glibly talked about the need to have peaceful relations with their Palestinian and Arab neighbours.

Since 18 December 2000, when the Security Council failed to adopt a draft resolution that would have led to the establishment of a United Nations force comprising military and police observers to be dispatched throughout the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, nearly 100 more Palestinians have been killed and thousands injured. By some accounts, to date nearly 400 Palestinians have lost their lives in the continuing violence on the ground, mainly as a direct result of the excessive use of force by Israeli security forces. We believe that the additional loss of lives and injuries sustained by the Palestinians could have been prevented had the Council discharged its responsibilities and acted decisively on that day to establish the proposed United Nations observer or monitoring force.

It was for this purpose that my Minister of Foreign Affairs travelled to New York, along with several of his colleagues from the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), under the leadership of the Foreign Minister of Qatar, representing the Chairmanship of the OIC. My Minister and his colleagues addressed this Council and made a strong plea for the establishment of a United Nations protections force. They had hoped that their pleas would convince the Council to make the right decision. Regrettably, this was not the case and the draft resolution was voted down by a very slim margin.

Those members of the Council that abstained in the voting on the draft resolution last December argued that more time was needed to allow Israel and Palestine to arrive at an agreement between themselves over larger issues, which might include the establishment of such an observer force. My delegation argued that, by doing so, the Council would be subjecting the establishment of the United Nations force to the vagaries of a tortuous and uncertain peace process. We did not believe then, nor do we believe now, that the fate of such an important — indeed, indispensable — United Nations force should be subjected to these uncertainties. We believed instead that the establishment of a United Nations force would have calmed the situation and certainly would have prevented the needless deaths and injuries sustained by Palestinian civilians these last several months. It would have sent a powerful message to Israel of the serious concern of the Council and the international community over its use of excessive force in handling the situation. It would also have demonstrated, in a tangible way, the Council's concern and sympathy for the dire plight of the Palestinian civilians, the victims of the current situation. It would be most unfortunate indeed if, in spite of these past tragic events, the Council were to continue to do nothing and to bear witness to more deaths and injuries in the coming months.

Malaysia joins the rest of the international community in its indignation over Israel's continued reliance on the use of massive and unmitigated forceful response to individual outbreaks of Palestinian protest throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Protracted closures of the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem; tight restrictions on the movement of people and goods; the withholding of customs and tax incomes from the Palestinian Authority that rightfully belong to it; and other measures of collective punishment have had a disastrous effect on the Palestinian economy. These draconian and inhumane measures have made life for the Palestinians a daily struggle for sheer survival. They have, inevitably, increased tension, provoked further violence and led to a further crisis of trust and confidence between the two sides, thereby making it even more difficult for the peace process to be put back on track.

My delegation recalls that some members of the Council made the point then that the issue of the United Nations monitoring force was still on the table and could be revisited at a later date. We therefore call on the Council to reconsider the proposal and to act now, and decisively, to stop the killing of Palestinian civilians in the occupied Territories. It cannot afford to continue to sit on the sidelines and do nothing on the argument that it is for the two sides to resolve their problem, knowing full well that this is not likely to happen anytime soon, especially in the wake of the recent elections in Israel and the formation of a new Government headed by Mr. Ariel Sharon. Clearly, the onus lies with Mr. Sharon, who, as we all know, precipitated the crisis in the first place.

This urgent meeting of the Council should send a clear signal of the expectation of the Council and the international community of an immediate end of the violence, and the early despatch of a United Nations observer force to the occupied territories would be a concrete step in that direction. We do not subscribe to the argument made in this Chamber today that Council action on this proposal would interfere in the peace process. Arguments for non-action by the Council are as unconvincing and self-serving today as they were in the past. Surely, they cannot hope to convince anyone but the speakers themselves.

We believe, on tne contrary, that the easing of tensions following the establishment of a United Nations observer force would contribute substantively to the peace process. It would create a climate that would be conducive to dialogue and negotiations. Continued tension through non-action by the Council would only exacerbate the situation and ensure the continuing spiral of violence.

This Council, which is quick to intervene in other conflict situations in order to protect civilians caught in armed conflict, cannot have a different set of standards in respect of the protection of Palestinian civilians. We believe that the establishment of a United Nations observer or monitoring force will be a concrete step in providing protection for them. The very credibility of the Council is at stake if nothing is done to deal with the situation immediately. Non-action by the Council, as advocated in some quarters, would be to consign the Palestinian issue and, in particular, the current grave situation in the occupied territories to continued neglect and indifference and to further cynical manipulation of the issue by Israel. My delegation is therefore encouraged to observe today the positive attitudes of most members of the Council on this important proposal.

May I conclude by expressing my delegation's deep and sincere appreciation for the diplomatic efforts undertaken by the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories. We thank him for his tireless efforts made towards what is likely to be a protracted process. We also support the efforts of the Secretary-General and continue to believe that such efforts can be pursued in parallel with those of the Council.

The President: I thank the representative of Malaysia for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Bahrain. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Buallay (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to see you, Sir, presiding over the Council this month. We greatly appreciate the efforts of the Permanent Representative of Tunisia during his presidency of the Council last month.

The Security Council is meeting today in the light of the extremely difficult conditions prevailing in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Children, youth and women are being killed daily. Grave violations of human rights are being committed. Occupied Palestinian cities are being subjected to a stifling blockade in order to starve their populations and to deny them basic sustenance. Israel is flouting the simplest and most basic international norms and laws.

Current events in the occupied Palestinian territories remind us of episodes from the First and Second World Wars, particularly those involving civilians and cities. When we consider the incredible advances in human and natural sciences and in technology since those days, we can barely comprehend what is happening to Palestinian civilians at the hands of the Israelis, similar as it is to the treatment received by the vanquished at the hands of the victors in those earlier conflicts. The basic difference is that today it is a case of occupied and occupier.

This Council has been called upon more than once since the current series of grave Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights began. The international community has given Israel more than one opportunity to change its policies of oppression, but to no avail. We must therefore redouble our efforts to halt this grave deterioration and its serious implications for international peace and security in the region. We call on the Security Council to assume its role and responsibility in the maintenance of international peace and security and to bring pressure to bear on Israel, the occupying Power, to end its aggressive practices against the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian people are in dire need of support and protection from Israeli brutality, which does not differentiate between children, young men, women and elderly people. In this regard, my delegation would like to express its support for the proposal to deploy an international protection force in the occupied territories, pursuant to the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel must cooperate with such a force.

The Palestinian question cannot be resolved if we do not pay sufficient attention to its root causes and their effects. We are not here simply to take note of Israeli violations of human rights, the suffocating blockade of Palestinian cities and other practices carried out by the Israeli occupying forces. We are here to deal with Israel's occupation of Palestine. The Security Council cannot stand idly by in the light of what is happening to Palestinian civilians and innocents.

Since the Security Council continues to hold special sessions aimed at protecting civilians and children in armed conflicts, and since it continues to send international observers to provide protection to such people, why then should it exclude the Palestinians from such international protection? What happens to the Palestinian people will be on the conscience of the international community — a conscience that is represented by the Council, which must assume its responsibilities and play its rightful role in the maintenance of international peace and security. Therefore a vote should be held on the proposal made to the Council to provide international protection to the Palestinians.

The President: I thank the representative of Bahrain for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Algeria. I invite him to take a sea at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Six months have elapsed since the Middle East was once again brutally thrust into the spotlight, struck by the endemic violence to which it seems doomed, following the unanimously condemned act of provocation by the man who ordered the Sabra and Shatila massacres, who led the disastrous campaign in Lebanon and who — irony of ironies — is now presiding over his country's fate.

That act of provocation, which triggered the tragedy that the Palestinian population is currently experiencing on a daily basis, clearly aimed to sabotage the peace process and to destroy, once and for all, any chance of a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question.

Today, it seems to everyone — most of all to the protagonists themselves — that the peace process is a thing of the past, and, given the changes that have taken place in Israel and the subsequent intensification of repressive measures against the population of the occupied territories, it appears unlikely to resume any time soon.

Indeed, not a day goes by without innocent young Palestinians being struck down — innocents who are armed only with their stubborn faith in an imminent victory against heavily armed soldiers who are determined to use force without any hesitation or restraint.

Every day, with untold brutality, this repression strikes a population that is already hard-hit and on the verge of suffocation, subjected as it is to summary executions; arbitrary arrests; the destruction of houses, roads and infrastructure; collective punishments; curfews; and the blockade of towns such as Ramallah, Tulkarem, Qalquilya, Bethlehem and Hebron.

The damage that has been caused by this all-out war waged by Israel against the Palestinian people is considerable. Hundreds are dead and thousands injured. The standard of living has dropped dramatically, since almost a million Palestinians — or a third of the population — have fallen below the threshold of absolute poverty since last September. Hundreds of schools have been closed because they can no longer operate, and there is a serious dearth of food and medication in many Palestinian towns, which are cut off from the rest of the world, and humanitarian assistance and basic emergency services can no longer reach them.

Furthermore, in flagrant violation of its obligations and in spite of the repeated appeals of the international community, Israel is continuing to withhold from the Palestinian Authority hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue that the Authority is owed.

In the light of this tragic situation, and given Israel's unrelenting attitude towards a defenceless population, the Palestinian Authority, backed by the Non-Aligned Movement, asked the Security Council several months ago to take steps to ensure the protection of that population and to put an end to the repression to which it is subject.

In spite of the great flexibility shown by the representatives of Arab States and non-aligned countries during the negotiations on the draft resolution, the Security Council chose last December not to act but to let the situation on the ground deteriorate, possibly until the point of no return.

The peace negotiations that were then under way between Palestinians and Israelis, under the auspices of the United States — which certain members of the Council said that they did not want to jeopardize through an untimely intervention by the United Nations in the field, in order to justify their opposition to the deployment of unarmed observers — have since then failed utterly, as have, because of the intransigence of the Israeli authorities, all of the efforts aimed at restoring calm and security.

The Council has taken an unacceptably passive stance vis-à-vis a Member State that for decades has been occupying with total impunity the territory of neighbouring States; which holds under its control an entire people, who are denied their most basic rights; and which refuses to implement the resolutions of the very Organization that created it and to fulfil its international obligations. How then can we not talk about a double standard and not condemn this injustice?

At this particularly difficult juncture, which could worsen further because of the repression, the intimidation and the systematic use of force, which seems to be the new course of action for the current Israeli administration, there is still time for the Security Council to assume its responsibility and fully to discharge its role and mandate vis-à-vis the Palestinian people and in respect of international legality.

First, it must urgently put an end to the policy of repression and of the systematic use of force, and in particular the use of real bullets against Palestinian demonstrators. It must also decide to promptly deploy United Nations observers in the Palestinian territories and in Jerusalem in order to protect the civilian population. It must also demand that Israel withdraw its forces from Palestinian towns and localities where they are deployed and put an end to the blockade of these towns. Lastly, it must order Israel, as the administering Power, to respect the Fourth Geneva Convention and the ensure the security and protection of Palestinian civilians.

These are demands of Algeria, which, like other Arab countries, believes in a just and lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East based on the principle of land for peace agreed upon in Madrid. This means the total withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Arab territories occupied in 1967 and the reinstatement of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people.

including their right to the establishment of an independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

I am convinced that these are also the expectations of the international community as a whole, which the Council must take into account and satisfy as early as possible.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Japan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Satoh (Japan): First, I want to welcome you back to New York, Mr. President. My delegation expresses its appreciation to you for providing us with this opportunity to discuss the grave situation we face today in the Middle East.

The current violence is already resulting in the tragic loss of more lives and material destruction, and we are concerned that the escalation of violence may bring about a disastrous result in the whole region. Moreover, the continued violence is damaging the political atmosphere for peace, which is a prerequisite for resuming substantive talks. We therefore urge all the parties concerned to make determined efforts to put an end to the current violence. We also call on all parties to refrain from any action that could further complicate the situation. Most importantly, they must observe the "blue line" identified by the United Nations last May.

As we all know, a negotiated peace is the only realistic option. We therefore urge the parties concerned yet anew to make every effort to resume their negotiations, especially the final status negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians.

In this context, we are encouraged by the fact that in its basic policy guideline, the new Israeli Government explicitly expressed its determination to pursue final peace agreements with the Palestinians and Syria, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and a peace treaty with Lebanon. It is also encouraging that Foreign Minister Shimon Peres came to discuss the issues with the Council yesterday.

Yet we have to point out that too strict a linkage between the cessation of violence and the resumption of negotiation could play into the hands of those elements who do not wish to seek a peaceful settlement and the coexistence of the State of Israel with an independent Palestinian State.

We believe that in the light of the heightened enmities, to resume dialogue is an essential first step in rebuilding confidence among the parties concerned. We therefore call on them to make every effort to do so as soon as possible.

The serious deterioration of the Palestinian economy is also a matter of grave concern to us. The livelihoods of the Palestinian people and the financial basis of the Palestinian Authority are being undermined. This will, no doubt, have a profoundly negative effect on the peace process. We therefore urge the Israeli Government to do its utmost to enable the Palestinians to resume their normal economic activities.

It is also critically important that the international community help alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians. Japan, for its part, has extended contributions to the Palestinians amounting to $12 million since the outbreak of the clashes.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Council that Japan will remain determined to make every possible effort to help achieve the cessation of violence and the resumption of the peace process.

The President: I thank the representative of Japan for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker on my list is the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Babaa (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to congratulate you at the outset, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. We also wish to extend a word of congratulations to you on the assumption of a new post in your country and to wish you every success. We are confident that, thanks to your great wisdom and skill, the Council deliberations this month will be successful. I also wish to express our deep appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Tunisia, my brother Mr. Said Ben Mustapha, for his impressive and judicious stewardship of the Council during the past eventful month.

The question of Palestine, its causes and outcome, are well known to the Council members and to the world. There is no need to recall that the Jewish problem was a European problem throughout history. It was never an Arab or an Islamic problem. The manner in which that problem was brought to the Arab region, to be disposed of, resulted in the uprooting and displacement of the Palestinian people from their homeland.

There is no need to recall the United Nations resolutions that still need to be implemented and that the Palestinian problem cannot be resolved without the return of the Palestinian people to their homeland and the establishment of their independent and sovereign State on their national territory. The Palestinian people have faced oppression and displacement for more than eight decades, and it continues to endure the brutality and horror of occupation. Now, they face the tanks of the occupying Power and its missiles and airplanes. Unarmed, they face that Power in defence of their rights, land, dignity, holy sites, history and future.

We know very little about what happens in the Palestinian territories, because the army of occupation tries to impede coverage of events there. The Committee for the Protection of American Journalists has recently addressed a letter to the occupying Power, expressing its concern about the safety of media representatives in the occupied territories. It expressed in a letter published by *The New York Times* its deep concern about the brutality committed by the Israeli army against journalists, adding that 12 journalists have been wounded by Israeli army bullets and beaten by internal security forces. Settlers still attack journalists, especially from *Reuters* and *Agence France Presse*, with impunity. In fact, some Israeli newspapers have started to talk about collective punishment and the tragedies endured daily by the Palestinians. Yesterday, *Ha'aretz*, the Israeli newspaper, published an article by the International Committee of the Red Cross condemning the collective punishment carried out by the army of occupation against the Palestinian population. This punishment is in violation of international and humanitarian laws, which require an occupying country to ensure normal living conditions for the occupied population. The newspaper said that the Israeli practices have become untenable and constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. It further said not only that the daily killings occur as a result of confrontations between Palestinian demonstrators and the army of occupation, but also that Palestinians are killed every day in their beds, on the doorsteps of their homes or on their way to their house, work or farm.

Every day we see reports of the killing of a mother or a child or an elderly man in cold blood by Zionist snipers. These practices are similar to Nazi practices. They take the form of confiscation of Palestinian lands, house demolitions, the uprooting of trees and restriction of the movement of Palestinians living near settlements. Highways and bypass roads are built to serve, according to the Red Cross, Israeli settlements.

I would also like to cite something from yesterday's edition of the Israeli newspaper, *Yediot Aharonot*:

> "For some five months now, in the territories" — that is, the occupied Palestinian territories — "there has been a slow but systematic and calculated process of annihilation of the Palestinian people. Soldiers who have been trained meticulously to target human beings aim their guns at eyes and knees to injure but not to kill, and they cannot discriminate between a demonstrator and a passer-by. At least 12,000 Palestinian civilians have been injured, become blind or incapacitated, and many have suffered the amputation of their arms. These injured will die slowly, away from the cameras. Some will die because they cannot find a hospital to treat them; others will not be able to survive hunger and the destruction of the infrastructure inflicted upon them."

If the Zionist occupation forces claim to be defending themselves, and that they do not kill in cold blood, why do they refuse to receive international inquiry commissions, and why do they not cooperate with such commissions? The Palestinians are expected to accept the peace of slaves and to live in less than 15 per cent of their historical homeland. They are expected to be confined to their homes and to observe curfews while settlers frolic and uproot their trees and confiscate their land under the protection of the occupation forces, as is now happening in Hebron.

The Council should not expect any response from the Zionist occupation army or any halting of their Nazi-like practices in occupied Palestinian territories, because the leaders of Tel Aviv are, in the majority, war criminals. This is a well-known fact. Indeed, there are calls within Israel itself to put General Mofaz, the

Israeli Army Chief of Staff, on trial as a war criminal, because he leads daily criminal practices as his forces carry out assassinations of Palestinians and destroy thousands of acres of farmland in the Palestinian territories. Other practices include preventing Palestinians from leaving their villages for work, or to run errands, purchase food and medicine or visit a doctor, because of the closing of exit points with rocks and trenches.

The hands of General Sharon are stained with the blood of Arabs and Palestinians, and he is proud of that. Now he is in a powerful position at the head of the Tel Aviv regime, resuming his mandate of imposing faits accompli and scorched-earth policies. A professor of sociology and political science at Johns Hopkins University published an article in *The Chicago Tribune* last month in which he analysed Sharon and described him as a war criminal. He cited many criminal acts and massacres that prove beyond any doubt that Sharon is a war criminal. The author also cited bloody crimes and massacres that irrefutably prove, even to his supporters, that Sharon is a war criminal. The author also referred to bloody events planned and executed by Sharon against the Palestinians, such as the massacres of Kibya, Sabra and Shatila, in addition to his desecration of Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem.

What is paradoxical is that at the time the international community practices double standards, the world remained silent when the butcher Sharon was elected as chief of the bloody military institution in Tel Aviv under the pretext that the elections took place in a free and democratic atmosphere. But in the case of the election of a right-wing politician in a European country where democracy prevailed, there was an outcry and a condemnation of it in the United States and in Europe. Diplomatic and trade relations with that country were threatened to be severed.

The sight of boys and young men who bravely face one of the mightiest military machines in the world, one supported by many hegemony-minded countries, affirms one thing: the Palestinian people insist on pursuing their resistance to an alien, settler, colonialist system that is unique in history. The Palestinians confirm that the usurpers and invaders will not enjoy their lives because of the usurpation of their land. They will not forget or forgive the usurpers for their horrific crimes against them.

As it is debating the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, the Council should not forget that the Palestinian people have lived under the longest term of military occupation in modern history, except for the Japanese occupation of Korea, and the Council should not forget its resolutions in order to redress the injustices suffered by the Palestinians and to uphold their legitimate and inalienable rights. It must not forget how the Zionists continue to violate the Geneva Conventions and to carry out systematic ethnic cleansing, and it must remember the massacres committed in Deir Yassin, Sabra and Shatila and the massacres that are taking place in broad daylight.

In conclusion, we call upon the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility towards maintaining international peace and security along the following lines. First, the Council must take the proper measures to provide full protection for the Palestinian people under international law and the Geneva Conventions. Secondly, the Council must agree to form an observer force under the aegis of the United Nations and deploy that force in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, in order to provide adequate protection. Thirdly, there must be condemnation of the Nazi-like practices committed by the Zionist occupation forces in the form of blockades, starvation, land confiscation, destruction of farmland and cold-blooded assassination through the use of internationally prohibited armaments.

Failure by the Council to take a decision now, under the pretext that it should provide the butcher Sharon an opportunity for discussion with the Secretary-General or delay in taking the proper decision, as one super-Power is doing at present, would mean that the Council is sending a message of encouragement to the occupation forces to continue their Nazi-like practices against Palestinians and is encouraging them to pursue their policies of occupation, annexation and confiscation of land, blockade and starvation and perpetuation of suffering.

The President: I thank the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Qatar, whom I invite to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Al-Khal (Qatar) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Mr. President, despite the very tragic conditions under which this meeting is being held, I would like to begin my statement by offering my congratulations to you for presiding over the work of the Council this month. I am fully confident that your wisdom and experience will crown the work of the Council with the desired success. My delegation would like to express its appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Said Ben Mustapha, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Tunisia to the United Nations, on the effectiveness and efficiency with which he managed the Council's work during his presidency. I would also like to extend my thanks to you for holding this meeting at the request of the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations as Chairman of the Arab Group this month.

We have come once again to your Council, Mr. President, to review the serious developments that are occurring in the occupied Arab lands and that to date have resulted in the killing of more than 350 innocent civilians, including women and children. Many thousands of others have been wounded because they are demanding the right to live in dignity.

Over the last few months the Council has hesitated to take decisive action concerning these developments in the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, despite the many interventions by peace-loving States, the last of which was a visit by the ministerial delegation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference led by the Qatari Minister for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani. That visit set a precedent that some considered to be an embodiment of the seriousness with which the situation in the region is being dealt with. All this hesitation and pussy-footing had an adverse impact and led to an escalation of the events and to an increase in the number of those killed and injured, and to an increase in unemployment on the Palestinian side due to the policies of isolation and siege and deliberate killing exercised by the occupying Israeli authorities.

The State of Qatar calls upon the Member States in the Security Council that abstained on the draft resolution submitted by the States members of the non-aligned group in the Security Council to review their previous positions.

The Israeli Government has shown its true face since the Israeli forces, beginning 11 March 2001, have implemented a serious aggressive plan against the Palestinian people that includes taking provocative measures on the ground, namely the dismantling of the West Bank into 43 parts and dividing the Gaza Strip into four parts or cantons. This has been accomplished through the deployment of military forces and tanks, digging trenches and setting up dirt barriers around population centres in Palestinian cities and villages in order to restrict the movement of citizens and thus to entrench the suffocating economic siege. All this is being done to subjugate the Palestinian people and to prevent them from earning a livelihood. This step on the part of the Israelis is a complementary measure to what they took in other areas with the aim of isolating the Palestinians within the occupied Arab territories from the outside world, as well as destroying the Palestinian economy. The policy of siege and suffocation and setting strict restrictions on the movement of people and goods has not only effected the Palestinian economy as a whole but has also individual Palestinian families, since students cannot get to their schools and labourers cannot get to their places of work. One can imagine the reaction when children are without schools and heads of families without work.

The tragic situation in the Palestinian territory at the moment forces the Security Council — in accordance with its mandate and responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security under Articles 24 and 37 of the Charter, and taking into account the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of civilians in occupied territories — to assume its responsibilities. First, it needs to provide adequate protection for the Palestinian people, which is exposed to the most brutal forms of repression and aggression as practised by the Israeli occupying forces, until it can exercise its full rights in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy without the pretext of compliance by the two parties to set up such a force, since Palestine is under the power of the occupying authority. It is not just that the Palestinians be informed that the United Nations cannot provide protection for them because those who are occupying their territory do not accept the provision of such protection. Secondly, the Council must put the necessary pressure on the present Israeli Government to force it to comply with the agreements that have been reached in the previous stages of the peace process, as well as to respect what has been achieved in the previous negotiations and to resume those negotiations where they had stopped.

The State of Qatar believes that a comprehensive and permanent peace in the Israeli-Arab conflict will not be achieved unless Israel complies with all the Security Council resolutions, particularly 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the principle of land for peace, thus enabling the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate rights. Foremost among these rights are the rights to return, self-determination and to establish their independent State on their national soil with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital, complete Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 as well as complete Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory to the internationally recognized borders, including the Shab'aa Farms, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978), and releasing all prisoners of war in Israeli prisons.

In conclusion, it must be understood that the Palestinians are not the cause of the security problems that Israel is facing. Israeli insistence on occupying Palestinian territory and its continuous aggression against the Palestinian people is the real cause of these problems. Eliminating Israeli security problems will not be achieved unless we put an end to the occupation and dismantle the settlements. Priority should be given to putting an end to the repression of the Palestinians, and measures for confidence-building should form the foundation that will enable the peoples of the area to live in permanent peace and security. The bloodletting that we witness daily must lead to a just settlement through negotiation based on the principle of land for peace, on international legitimacy and on the resolutions of the Security Council, and not on the use of force.

The President: I thank the representative of Qatar for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative Sweden. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Schori (Sweden): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey align themselves with this statement.

The prospect of peace must return to the Middle East. There is no alternative to a political solution. The European Union reiterates today its deep concern at the chain of violent events during the last months and holds that it is the responsibility of the Israeli as well as the Palestinian authorities to do their utmost to prevent actions resulting in new victims. We call on both parties to act with maximum restraint and to do their utmost to prevent terrorist acts and the growth of sentiments of revenge.

New talks on security must get underway. The European Union appeals to the Government of Israel and to the Palestinian Authority to re-engage immediately in security cooperation in order to reverse the spiral of violence.

The humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories is of great concern. The current economic crisis is unacceptable and threatens the stability of the region and the prospects for peace. Both parties have a duty to minimize tensions between them. Improving the economic situation in the occupied territories is an important element in that effort. On 26 February the European Union decided to make the funds in its existing Cash Facility — €60 million — available as grants to the Palestinian Authority. The funds will be disbursed in the context of a concerted international effort and on the condition that the Palestinian Authority draw up a revised budget as a basis for international support and take more effective measures against corruption and towards more transparency. The European Union urges other donors to increase their contributions to help meet the severe challenges facing the Palestinian economy.

In view of its devastating effects on the Palestinian economy, and therefore on political stability, the European Union stresses the importance of immediately ending the withholding of revenue payments due to the Palestinian Authority. Israel should transfer at once those tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority. The European Union also reiterates the importance of ending the blockades in the Palestinian areas so that the acute economic and humanitarian crises can be brought to an end. Israel must allow and facilitate access for humanitarian personnel and goods to Palestinian territories.

The European Union notes the recent easing of the closures on Hebron, Bethlehem, Tulkarem and Qualquilya, and believes that more needs to be done to lift the closures in the Palestinian territories. During a recent visit to the region, a European Union delegation led by the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ms. Anna Lindh, expressed to Prime Minister Sharon and Minister for Foreign Affairs Peres, as well as to President Arafat, the European Union's willingness to help move the peace process forward. It was underlined that no opportunity for a peaceful settlement should be missed, despite the present crisis in the region. The European Union also raised the issue of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories, and of possible assistance by the international community. In addition, the issues of closures and transfers of tax revenues were raised by the European Union.

Prime Minister Sharon expressed understanding for the European Union's concerns over the various practices of collective punishment. The European Union reads this as a promising first step.

On the Israeli-Palestinian track, the European Union understands that much ground has been covered in open and frank negotiations. The European Union is convinced that the progress made on all major issues during the last negotiations should form the basis for future talks on permanent status. The Union also looks forward to a prompt resumption of the negotiations between Israel, on the one hand, and Syria and Lebanon, on the other.

The European Union reaffirms its view that the basis for negotiations and for a just and lasting pace must be Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions. It must also include the principle of the inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by war, the need for every State in the area to be able to live in security, and the principle of land for peace. The European Union calls upon the parties to reaffirm their commitments to the basic principles established within the framework of Madrid, Oslo and subsequent agreements, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The European Union deplores all acts of violence. In this context, the European Union reiterates its strongly held opinion that Israel's policy on extrajudicial killings is unacceptable and contrary to the rule of law, and it urges Israel to cease this practice and thus respect international law. Extrajudicial killings are an obstacle to peace and could provoke further violence.

The European Union recalls its recent declaration in response to the two executions carried out by the Palestinian Authority on 13 January, encouraging President Arafat to consider a moratorium on the death penalty and reiterating its view that the abolition of the death penalty worldwide would contribute to the enhancement of human dignity.

For months we have seen Palestinian and Israeli casualties. The situation is intolerable, and both parties must shoulder their responsibilities and bring the senseless violence and human suffering to a halt, and thus open up perspectives and give hope to Palestinians and Israelis for a better life in dignity and security. The lack of progress in the peace process, including on the settlements issue, lies at the heart of the Palestinian population's frustration.

The international community, including the United Nations and its Secretary-General, can play an important role in assisting the parties. The European Union supports the idea that, as requested by Security Council members in November of last year, the Secretary-General should explore with the parties arrangements for an observer mission.

The European Union reiterates its willingness to contribute to advancing the Middle East peace process.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of the Sudan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Erwa (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my sincere congratulations to you and to your friendly country, Sir, on Ukraine's assumption of the presidency of the Council for the current month. I would also like to extend my congratulations to your predecessor, Ambassador Saïd Ben Mustapha, Permanent Representative of Tunisia, and to the members of his delegation for their superb stewardship of the Council last month. I would also like to pay tribute to the new members of the Council.

In beginning my remarks, I would like to associate the Sudan's position of support with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Many months after the last open meeting of the Security Council on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, which took place last year, the situation in occupied Palestine continues to worsen. This is due to the fact that the occupying Power continues to employ excessive use of military force against innocent, unarmed Palestinians. The occupying Power also continues to carry out its criminal plan to tighten the blockade against Palestinian towns and villages so as to strangle the Palestinian economy and to subjugate and starve the Palestinian people. All those efforts are first and foremost meant to isolate the Palestinian people within the occupied territories and to cut them off from the outside world, to destroy the Palestinian economy and to undermine the infrastructures of Palestine. This is in addition to the declared measures aimed at changing the demographic and geographic composition of the Palestinian territories through the building of settlements, and through measures taken in the Holy City of Jerusalem with a view to creating new realities on the ground that will be difficult to reverse in the future.

The primary responsibility for the rising death toll among the innocent civilian Palestinian population in occupied Palestine falls squarely on the Security Council, which last December failed to adopt a draft resolution calling for protecting the Palestinian people — and especially women and children — from the daily acts of aggression committed by the Israeli occupation forces. The Council put forward untenable justifications that cast doubt on its credibility before world public opinion and that in fact confirmed the Council's practice of double standards and its lack of even-handedness. The Council gave the entire world the impression that Israel was exempt from the provisions and rules governing international peace and security that, under the Charter of the United Nations, are supposed to be upheld by the Security Council.

The daily criminal acts of aggression committed by Israel against the Palestinian people, in addition to its violations of resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council and of international humanitarian law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, put this Council to a real and major test. We therefore expect the Council to rise to its level of responsibility by reconsidering its previous position and moving forward in order to adopt effective measures that would ensure an end to violence and to the use of random force by the Israeli occupation authorities against innocent Palestinian civilians and to mandate the composition of an international force to protect them.

Any failure by the Council to establish a protection force to protect the Palestinians against daily repressive measures by the occupying Power and to monitor the situation in occupied Palestine would be tantamount to backtracking by the Council from its obligations as set forth in the Charter and would also be tantamount to a protection of the aggressor and an encouragement to that aggressor to further pursue the daily acts of killing and torture against the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, we would like to reaffirm what we have said before this Council on previous occasions — that the long-sought peace in the Middle East will not be achieved as long as Israel persists in its expansionist policies, its acts of oppression and aggression and its efforts to Judaize Jerusalem. The only viable way to bring about peace throughout the Middle East is to end the Israeli occupation through a real commitment by Israel to the land-for-peace formula. Israel must fully comply with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which constitute the foundation of the peace process in the Middle East. For its part, Israel has indeed moved backwards in this process by disavowing its commitments and promises, in the belief that it can achieve its full security at the expense of the security of other parties.

The President: I thank the representative of the Sudan for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of South Africa. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Nacerodien (South Africa): I would like to congratulate Ukraine on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March 2001. On behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the President for convening this important discussion in the Council. It is essential that we as the United Nations take action to address the pressing situation in Palestine.

Just last month, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Terje Roed Larsen, issued a report on the impact of the repressive measures on the Palestinian people. According to Mr. Roed Larsen, the Palestinian economy has suffered gross domestic product losses of over $900 million since the onset of the crisis and labour income losses of over $240 million. Based on World Bank data, the report estimates that 32 per cent of the population is now living in poverty — a 50 per cent increase since the onset of the crisis.

Closures, blockades and restrictions on the movement of goods, persons and resources imposed by Israel have resulted in the economic suffocation of the Palestinian people. By any standards these figures clearly show the devastating impact that the closures have on the Palestinian economy, fuelling and fomenting dangerously high levels of frustration and violence.

The international community, much less the Security Council, cannot remain silent whilst a militarily superior occupying force violates international humanitarian law. How many more innocent lives must be lost before we take action?

The Non-Aligned Movement repeats the call on the Security Council to pass a resolution mandating the immediate deployment of a force to protect Palestinian civilians against the impact of the military campaign of the Israeli armed forces. The United Nations, and in particular the Security Council as the custodian of international peace and security, must adopt measures to bring an immediate end to the suffering of the Palestinian people.

The recent closure of Palestinian towns by the Israeli Defence Force, in particular the ongoing blockade of Ramallah, has further undermined the already precarious humanitarian situation in the occupied territories. Palestinian civilians are not only being prevented from reaching their places of work in Israel, but they are also being denied access to essential food and medicine supplies.

Such a heavy-handed and disproportionate response by Israel constitutes an affront to the most basic rights of the Palestinian people. These actions contravene Security Council resolution 1322 (2000), which calls upon Israel to meticulously abide by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. As members of this Council well know, the Fourth Geneva Convention expressly prohibits the collective punishment of a civilian population. The Non-Aligned Movement therefore reiterates its call on Israel to act with restraint and to meticulously abide by its legal obligations with respect to the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

The Conference of High Contracting Parties of the Fourth Geneva Convention held in Geneva in July 1999 stated its readiness to reconvene should the need arise. The High Contracting Parties had, in common article 1, agreed to "undertake to respect and ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances". Clearly the time has come for the High Contracting Parties to meet urgently on the situation in Palestine.

The Non-Aligned Movement has long affirmed that the question of Palestine constitutes the nucleus of the Middle East conflict. The achievement of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital is pivotal to the achievement of a sustained and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The Movement believes that peaceful negotiation is the only means of ensuring lasting peace, security and stability in the region. We urge the parties to take the required steps to ensure the cessation of hostilities, to restore calm and to adopt measures to re-establish mutual trust. It is only then that an atmosphere conducive to the resumption of negotiations can be created.

We firmly believe that the condition of land for peace is essential if meaningful progress in the peace process is to be attained. For a durable, just and comprehensive peace, negotiation towards final status issues has to be in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy.

Once more the Non-Aligned Movement wishes to repeat our firm belief that it remains the permanent responsibility of the United Nations to stay fully engaged in the Palestinian question until a definitive solution is achieved.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Kuwait. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to extend to you, Sir, our thanks and appreciation for your positive response to the request of the Arab Group to convene this meeting to discuss the deteriorating situation of our Palestinian brothers in the occupied Palestinian territories. I wish also to extend to you and to the Government of Ukraine our special congratulations on your presidency of this Council. We are confident that you will guide the work of the Council in an able manner.

I wish also to register our appreciation for the outstanding efforts of your predecessor, my brother from Tunisia, in managing the affairs of the Council last month in a manner that reflected his great and renowned experience in the international arena.

Our participation today in the discussion of the illegal Israeli practices against the Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, affirms the dangers and consequences of the provocative behaviour of Ariel Sharon, the Prime Minister of Israel, on 28 September, when he paid a notorious provocative visit to Al-Haram Al-Sharif. That visit laid a heavy political burden on Israel, but is by no means heavier than the bitterness and pain of the brotherly Palestinians. It was an arrogant act that revealed hatred for all elements of the peace and stability to which we in the Arab States aspire.

Kuwait strongly deplores Israeli practices against Palestinian civilians and the methods of repression deliberately employed by occupying soldiers against defenceless innocent people fighting for their freedom from the occupation authorities. Our concern is increased by the fact that the Israeli Government is using all forms of repression and violence against Palestinian civilians, approximately 400 of whom have been killed to date. Following these deliberate killings, including of defenceless children, since 7 March Israel has imposed a policy of blockade on the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. This has further aggravated the living conditions of Palestinian people in every walk of life to a level that is unacceptable to any human being.

All this undoubtedly represents a violation of United Nations resolutions and the principles of international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and the obligations emanating therefrom under the two Protocols Additional of 1977. In this context, we call for a consideration of ways to guarantee the full implementation of that Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem.

The suffering of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories requires the firm resolve of the international community to give no credence to the allegations of the Israeli Government that it is acting to alleviate the consequences of the blockade on the Palestinian people. The Security Council is fully responsible for ensuring the security and safety of the Palestinian civilians and for safeguarding their dignity and right to live free from the repression of the occupying Power. Thus, we extend our absolute support for the Palestinian request that a United Nations force be established to protect Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. We trust that the establishment of such a force will reveal the truth and will curb the brutal Israeli practices perpetrated daily against the Palestinian civilians.

In Kuwait, we do not understand why the Israeli Government is afraid of the establishment of a protection force, especially since Israel claims that it is not responsible for the violence occurring there. If it is sincere, it is illogical that it should oppose the establishment of such a force. We also believe that the creation of a force to guarantee the protection of the Palestinians would contribute to stability and restore the situation as it was in the past. Moreover, the report of the fact-finding mission established under a resolution of the Commission on Human Rights stresses the need to establish an international mechanism to protect Palestinian civilians.

In Kuwait, we support all peaceful initiatives designed to find a just solution to the Palestinian question in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy, particularly Security Council resolution 242 (1967). We maintain our firm stance in solidarity with the just requests and claims of the Palestinians for their legitimate political rights and to establish their independent State on their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital. We wish to emphasize that, if peace is to be just and comprehensive, it should be based on international resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the principle of land for peace. This should lead to Israel's withdrawal from all the Arab territories it occupied in 1967, including the Syrian Golan, and to its complete withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

The President: I thank the representative of Kuwait for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Iraq. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Al-Douri (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Mr. President, allow me to extend to you my congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month and to wish you every success. I should like, through you, to thank the Ambassador of Tunisia, Said Ben Mustapha, for a job well done as President of the Council last month, and also to extend my thanks to you for your quick response to the request to consider this important and serious issue, which deals with the very essence of the work of the Council — the maintenance of international peace and security.

My delegation, despite the fact that we are very doubtful as to the possibility of finding a just solution to this very serious problem, hopes that today's discussions of the issue will lead to an end to the continuous and unjust aggression to which the unarmed brotherly Arab Palestinian people are facing on their land and in their homes.

We have previously dealt with this issue — not so long ago. The Council held formal and informal consultations, but, regrettably, we did not reach any results. This is because of the insistence of one country — the United States of America — on maintaining the status quo, under many flimsy pretexts and excuses.

That State provides the occupying Zionist entity with the means of force that enable it to exercise daily its aggressive policies against the Palestinian people. It also continues to direct threats against many other Arab countries.

The failure of the Council to deter the aggressor was, and still is, one of the principal reasons for the continuation of the Palestinian bloodshed and the increase in the number of martyrs, among them Palestinian youths and children. All of this takes place in full view of the international community, which seems incapable of taking any measures to halt this aggression and to put an end to the occupation.

Is it not strange that a notorious terrorist with a long history of bloodshed, who is directly responsible for shedding Palestinian blood, should preside over the Zionist entity? Indeed, this has led to the unmasking of the ugly face of Zionism. This person, who carried out the Sabra and Shatila massacres, is the same person who desecrated the Temple Mount on 28 September, leading to the wave of violence against the Palestinians, which has not yet stopped.

This terrorist started his work, as an official in the Zionist entity, by escalating the aggression through the taking of measures to dissect the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. He has exercised his hobbies in a most arrogant manner: political assassinations, the imposition of sieges and the blocking of access to food and medicine by Palestinian villages and cities, thus violating the principles of the Geneva Conventions and of international humanitarian law.

This outrageous situation and these irresponsible, criminal measures make it imperative for the Security Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter and to take decisive measures aimed at halting this unceasing aggression against the unarmed Palestinian people, who have nothing but stones.

My delegation has clarified its position with respect to this issue on more than one occasion. In the Security Council meeting held on 4 October 2000, we clearly pointed out that the question is not how to force the Palestinians into an unbalanced round of negotiations with the occupying Power, because the negotiations will definitely not restore their rights.

But one must consider the essence of the problem in order to find the appropriate solutions. The problem began when a British citizen by the name of Balfour promised, in 1917, another British citizen, by the name of Rothschild, that he would set up a national homeland for him and for other extremists in Palestine. Thus the prince gave to others what he did not own.

The question essentially concerns the military occupation of Palestinian land by a flood of adventurers from Europe and other parts of the world, under the pretext that it was an unpopulated land. At issue are the continuous and repetitive acts of aggression carried out by this usurping entity against the Arab States and its occupation of the Palestinian territory since 1948, in addition to its occupation of the Syrian Golan and Lebanese territory.

In summary, we are dealing with the tragedy of a people under occupation, subjected to the worst forms of repression, brutality and displacement. The question is the suffering of more than 4 million Palestinian refugees, who were forced to leave their land, in contravention of the principles of international law, which guarantee their full right to return to their homeland.

The Zionist, racist creed, which is expansionist, arrogant and hateful, is the reason behind all the tragedies that have befallen the Palestinian people, including the desecration of holy sites that more than a billion Muslims, and Christians as well, hold sacred.

In short, this is the essence of the Palestinian question, and these are its principal components. So if we want a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, we should consider all these elements, because together they represent the essence of the tragedy of the Palestinian people. If we fail to do so, the Zionist aggression will continue, and the Security Council will continue to be incapable of assuming its responsibilities vis-à-vis this serious situation, which threatens, and will continue to threaten, international peace and security.

The President: I thank the representative of Iraq for the kind words he addressed to me.

There are a number of speakers remaining on my list. In view of the lateness of the hour, and with the concurrence of the members of the Council, I intend to suspend the meeting now. The meeting is suspended until early next week. The time will be announced in the *Journal*.

The meeting was suspended at 7 p.m.